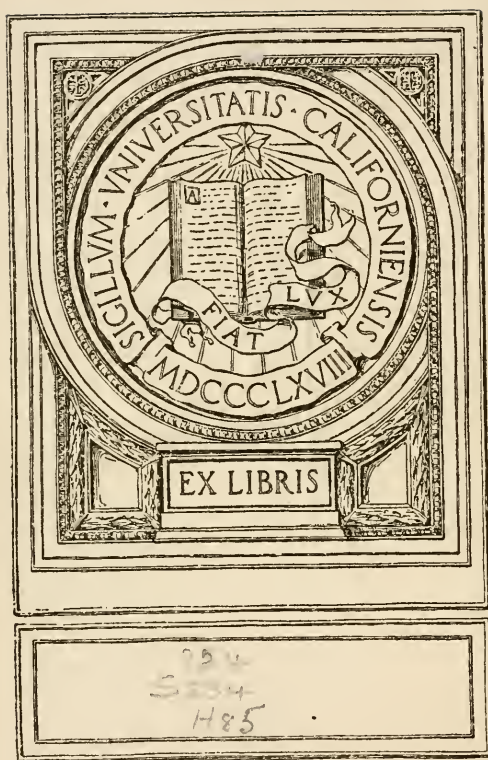


BERNARD·SHAW

A·CRITICAL·STUDY·BY

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*“ Bernard Shaw ? I never heard of him. He’s
a Methodist preacher, I suppose ”*

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I

INTRODUCTION IN
DEFIANCE OF POSTERITY

I

THERE is a singular modern heresy, sprung from one does not quite know where, according to which it is not possible to speak the truth about a writer until that writer is dead; nor can the truth be then immediately spoken, for in the record of the dead, as is well known, we must see nothing but the good. The result of this double inhibition is curious but frequently observed: it is to shift the burden of critical appraisal on to the shoulders of posterity. There was once a man, we are told, who refused to do anything for posterity on the ground that posterity had done nothing for him; but now we find his saw of little might. In the field at least of literary judgment, we are becoming accustomed to leave to posterity a very delicate and a very difficult duty. Posterity to-day is very far from doing nothing for us; posterity is in the habit of making up our minds.

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Now criticism will do well, on any ground, to offer its opposition to this modern attitude of deference towards posterity, at least in its more extreme manifestations. At the outset of a labour such as the present one, the subject of which happens to be happily far from dead, criticism has flatly to refuse to be intimidated. It might begin with a "Far be it from the present writer to usurp the functions of posterity," or a "We are too near the subject of this study to see his work in a just perspective"; but, while the preliminary and liberal use of these phrases would gain for their user great credence—since the majority of readers, and one's self among them, are ever open to the familiar pleasure of the incantation—the loss would be more effective than the gain. One cannot for ever be saying "perhaps"; the polite labour is intolerable. It might be different if the subject of the present study were to be treated here to a biographical explication. A man's personal deeds, a man's private reactions from and upon his contemporaries, the varying amounts of a man's bank balance, have all their relevance, even their artistic relevance, when his life comes to be written; and it is perfectly true, indeed it is obvious, that a man's life cannot be written until the life has been lived—although the

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attempt sometimes is made. (It has been made in the case of our own subject.) Here, if you like, is a function for posterity, although not necessarily for a posterity indefinitely removed.

But with the public works of a creative artist it is different. I know of no real distinction in kind which should make it any more impossible for us to know what we think, and to say it, in regard to a man's just-finished play or picture than in regard to St. Paul's Cathedral, which also is finished. You may speak of the difficulty of getting the work into a just perspective ; but then the difficulty of getting St. Paul's Cathedral into a just perspective was no more and no less on the day it was completed than it is to-day—if anything, indeed, it was less difficult, because you had not the irrelevant accretions which interfere with the view. You had, of course, to step back to do it. Now this act of stepping back is, or should be, a commonplace of criticism ; its achievement is what is known as an attitude of detachment. By all means criticism should be detached. Let us suppose this attitude to be difficult, and you will then know your critic by his ability to achieve it ; but you will not of necessity postpone all critical absolutes until the attitude of detachment is mechani-

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cally inevitable through passage of time. There is small credit in the act of stepping back from an object which has already receded into a comfortable middle distance. You do not praise a man for his attitude of detachment in regard to the train which has left him behind on the platform. And the criticism of posterity is in this position of vantage, that its attitude of detachment is found ready made. This would amount to a positive and an inherent superiority, worthy perhaps of all the deference which our day is ready to pay to it, if it were not for the fact that works of art are all the same age. There are changes in taste that are cyclical, but these again it is part of the elementary business of criticism to allow for, as a skilful golfer allows for the wind.

If there were any absolute critical windfall, as it were, which "fell in" to posterity, we should expect every utterance made at this distance of time about Shakespeare to be laden with riches; while the plain truth is that it is as easy to-day to write nonsense about Shakespeare as it is to write nonsense about Mr. Shaw. No sooner is Shakespeare's self-criticism in terms of marble and the gilded monuments of princes excluded (on the ground that no man can achieve an attitude of detachment in regard to his own works), than the contemporary judgment of

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Ben Jonson, which betrayed a regrettable unwillingness to stand aside and let posterity have the last word, is seen to have proved disturbingly near to the mark. If distance in itself, which lends enchantment to the view, were the creator in addition of some absolute value, we should have to conclude that Mr. Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare, for example, must be juster than Hazlitt's in the exact ratio of three to two—that being the degree in which the astigmatism had been corrected. But the fact is, of course, that the whole of the contributory value of criticism, the benefit accruing from a just appraisal, lies in the critic's eye—in the normality of the personal vision. Regarded as objective material for the exercise of that vision, there is not the smallest difference between the text of Homer and the text of Mr. Hardy, between a play by Shakespeare and a play by Mr. Shaw. Hamlet defined an excellent play as one well digested in the scenes and set down with as much modesty as cunning; and if you are willing to adopt that as your standard of judgment, or at least to admit that it is a recognizable standard of judgment, there is nothing to prevent its application to Mr. Shaw's plays as well as to the play in which Hamlet himself appears. It would be different if it

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were the absolute truth that personal criticism pretended to speak ; for since truth is only to be found in the accumulation of judgments, we might then have to waive our own right of judgment, as we are so often invited to do, in favour of the " judgment of time." But a criticism which has learned the A B C of its business does not pretend it is the absolute truth it is speaking. It pretends to speak the truth that is in it ; and what more, if we demand for it a single mouthpiece, can poor posterity do ?

II

Now the subject of this study, as it happens, has had something to say about the normality of the critical vision, as well as about the part properly played by posterity. The subject of this study has had something to say about most things. As regards normal vision, Mr. Shaw has narrated one of the most justly celebrated of his anecdotal reminiscences. The story goes that he went to the oculist to have his eyesight reported upon, and was profoundly dashed, as a lifelong believer in his own eccentricity, when told that it was " normal " ; a temporary disappointment from which our subject quickly recovered, however, when he learned that the eyesight of only five

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per cent, or fifteen per cent, or whatever the proportion is of the population, was normal. At this fresh evidence that he was one of a good swingeing minority—a minority which he has since publicly estimated at the proportion of one to forty-eight millions—our subject was correspondingly elated ; and, being elated, he wrote a preface about it. With the aid of this clinical misnomer for analogy, our subject established conclusively, to his own satisfaction, that he it was alone who saw life steadily and saw it whole, while the rest of his fellows—the “ abnormal ” herd of the forty-eight millions—were unfortunate enough to see it askint. The importance of this event in the career of our subject can hardly be over-estimated ; for since we all of us wish to be normal, and since Mr. Shaw alone among us is normal, or almost alone—the five or the fifteen per cent might be regarded, at a generous estimate, as the members of the Fabian Society—it follows of necessity that he has had to do his best to teach us to see with his eyes ever since. Our subject is far too thorough a humanitarian to have endured, beyond his twenty-fourth year or so, the spectacle of the blind leading the blind. Fortunately for us, and in the mercy of Providence, our subject has seen it on the whole as a comic spectacle.

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Waggery, as he says, has been his medium. But our subject has lived to deplore that what he has uttered in jest we have not taken in earnest ; and it is in this regard that he has lent himself to the appeal to posterity. Of course, since the forty-eight millions of us are in enjoyment of a vision which is aberred, our opinion of what precisely our subject has been up to can hardly be worth taking. But the appeal to posterity has been made by our subject not only by what one might call the authority of the Census (a census of folly which Carlyle was the first to take), but also by the light of philosophy ; for “a jest,” he has declared, “is an earnest in the womb of time.” Now Hamlet, if he did not say that, said something very much like it, and the thought has been long enough in the world for one to have, on general grounds, no quarrel with it. Twenty years ago, when our subject was writing the ripest of his stage comedies, the motor-car was a jest which had to proceed, under statutory enactment, at a walking pace with a man with a red flag in front of it. To have proposed in the year 1894, from your place in the House, that the legal limit for motor-cars should be what it is at present, would have been to run serious risk of being unseated on petition as a jester. The jest of a

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legal limit of twenty miles an hour has now for some time been an earnest (and a shameful thing it should be so low!—that is what we to-day are saying); if Mr. Shaw tells us that twenty years ago it was a jest which was an earnest in the womb of time, we shall understand him quite perfectly. For centuries in England it was a jest to say that pigs might fly, and pigs may fly to-day any afternoon they are taken to Hendon. On general grounds, then, no quarrel is possible with our subject's utterance, that a jest is an earnest in the womb of time. But on the particular ground of Mr. Shaw's own jests, we have to refuse very positively one inference from this utterance, or else this study cannot possibly be proceeded with. For one inference is that a jest of Mr. Shaw's cannot fairly be the subject of criticism until it has issued from the womb of time in good earnest. In other words, we may not say that we think Mr. Shaw wrong until we have given Time time to prove him right. We may not say that we think Mr. Shaw right for fear that posterity should know him to be wrong. If Mr. Shaw prophesies the full working beauties of Social Democracy in England (as he does, if only we miserable forty-eight millions have the will), we may not say whether we should personally fancy Social Democracy

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until we find ourselves in the middle of it. In other words, we are to get it, and then to have full liberty to say whether we are happy or not. We are not to say whether we like the Superman until we find ourselves Supermen—or until our posterity find that they are nothing of the sort.

Now this is the negation of criticism, and, ridiculous as it may appear, it is yet not far from what is sometimes, implicitly or explicitly, put forward. We may not say whether we should like posterity to regard Mr. Shaw as a great man or not, and in what particulars, until posterity has had an opportunity for declaring for itself in the matter. Far be it from the present writer to usurp the functions of posterity; but there is one function which posterity cannot perform, and that is to add to the illumination of the present. To-morrow's moon may have shaken off its attendant clouds, but to-morrow's moon won't help us home to-night to supper, and we had far better be guided by the light of our own horn lantern. Our subject has complained that he has written plays to explain his views, and has written prefaces to explain his plays, and that he could quite well explain the prefaces if he chose, only the result would be that people who have misunderstood the plays and the

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prefaces would misunderstand the further explanations ten times more. If this statement of affairs were the plain truth, this book would have to look no further for its justification ; on the analogy of the national game (which one is sure our subject must dislike extremely) one might advocate a change of bowling. But though our subject has spoken the truth that is in him, no man more gallantly, it cannot be described as the plain truth. When Mr. Shaw seems to assert (if he can forgive the metaphor) that he has bowled his heart out and failed to reach the wicket, the assertion is excessive. No man of letters has taken the middle stump of his generation more successfully, but while he has been attacking in earnest the defenders have insisted upon regarding it as only a game. Now that has its tragic aspects ; and it is apparent already that the task of this study will be nine parts that of reconciliation. " I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good Master Cobweb." Only if our subject is disappointed in contemporaneity because it has taken the jest and left the earnest, notwithstanding that our age, as he says, " walks visibly pregnant with it," we cannot leave it to posterity to settle their difference. If this task becomes a study in embryotomy, we shall have to go through with it.

III

Let us assert, then, at the outset of this task, that since its subject has issued to the world a considerable body of work it is possible to know, and to say, what we think of that body of work. In face of the fact that that body of work has patently not been without influence on its generation, let us assert that the time has come when it is possible to appraise that influence. Let us even assert the belief that, added to as we hope that work will be, its total value will not now be considerably augmented or modified; coupling with this belief another, that that work's influence has at this moment reached a point at which it is singularly susceptible of at least approximate estimation. In both these regards posterity will enjoy a natural advantage over us; but we need not be discouraged on that account. Let us add, in conclusion of these critical preliminaries, that the natural advantages posterity will enjoy in the matter of biographical explication posterity is hereby left in undisputed possession of; for biographical explication is no part of the intention of the present study. The deprivation may be suffered all the more willingly since the subject of our study, we may be sure, will continue to be his own biographer.

II

ECONOMICS

I

IF we turn in this section of this study to the consideration of Mr. Shaw as political economist, it is with no wish to surprise that we do so. For if we come to think about it, it was to political economy that Mr. Shaw himself turned first, if we neglect for the moment (but only for the moment) his almost but not entirely negligible novels. And if we do not think about it, if we have not, that is to say, the sequential order of our subject's career as clearly before us as we should have if it were his biography we were engaged on, do we not then with equal ease deduce the economist from the dramatist? It will be some part of the purpose of this study to do so. We shall find that Mr. Shaw, in his capacity as dramatist (and that, after all, is only one of his capacities), has built, not on the human heart, as Browning's *Sordello* exhorted the poet to do, but on the "economic man" of the economists. And if my word is not conclusive, as, at this stage, it can hardly

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be expected to be, we have the word of Mr. Shaw himself, who wrote in a letter to Professor Henderson, "In all my plays my economic studies have played as important a part as a knowledge of anatomy does in the works of Michael Angelo."

II

There is no man who prides himself more on the normality of his vision than the economist; indeed, he is often a man who thinks that no other men have any vision at all. Political economy is the only game you may engage in (except perhaps politics) with forty-eight million pawns, and have for your board the national exchequer. At the same time it is one of the most secret of vices; more secret than politics, in which you have occasionally to meet your opponent at the poll, although you need never meet his arguments. But the political economist may go on playing his own game in his own corner, awarding us our income under his pet law of wages, which he terms an "iron" law, and disposing of it to his own satisfaction; and we, who make our living and spend it—or who spend it without making it—may not be aware of his existence. I suppose there are not ten men at this moment in the City of London,

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engaged in bringing us our bread, who have the smallest grasp of the economic theory, as distinct from the business principle, of what they are doing. This is neither to their credit nor their discredit ; the unreality of the economist is almost a point of faith in England. Partly the reason is that the orthodox economists have contented themselves with “ explaining ” the system by which we live, and as their explanation has always amounted to one hundred good reasons why that system cannot possibly be different in any respect, it is no surprise that we have not taken the trouble to read them. For the system by which one lives, the iron laws, that is to say, which govern the fact that one’s particular slice of bread and butter is no bigger, is not a thing one wants to read about—merely to learn that one’s slice *can* be no bigger. It is not a thing like the theory of music, without some study of which one cannot be a musician ; or the theory of literary technique, without which one cannot write good novels (despite a very general belief to the contrary). By the sweat of one’s brow to earn one’s bread is partly an instinct and partly a stern necessity ; and there is small blame to the plain man if he think neither his instincts nor his necessities a proper subject for theoretic study.

But the Socialists altered all this, because they said to the plain man *if* you study the theory of the system by which you live you will see that your slice may be, nay ought to be, bigger. The Socialists thus provided the first definite inducement in the history of the world (for the study is as old as Aristotle) for the plain man to read the economists. He would read the orthodox economists, that is to say, to find them out; to detect in their writings what Bentham called the sinister interest—to convict them of canonizing a system merely because it was the system that was current. The Socialists he would read to obtain a glimpse of an ideal system; or to learn how, by a catastrophic upheaval of the simplest kind, he might increase the size of his own slice of bread and butter. Unfortunately the Socialists, when they were economists, were not very good artists, and when they were artists, were not very good economists; and frequently they were neither. How charming a picture Fourier might have made of the phalanstery, if he had had one quarter of the art of Sir Thomas More; but he had not any at all, merely the vocabulary of his calling, which was that of a commercial traveller. How persuasive Marx might have been, if his explanation that all values are only definite masses of congealed labour-time,

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and therefore the sole property of the plain man, had not been more positively unreadable than the explanations of the orthodox economists, in addition to being less accurate. With what eagerness we should have thrown ourselves into the Utopia of Morris, if the limpid and beautiful book had contained any more precise instructions for its attainment than the conversion of the Houses of Parliament into a municipal dung-heap. But it didn't; and even though England for once had grown a Socialist, instead of importing him—Fourier, Saint-Simon, Engels, Marx—the system went on working, and the orthodox economists went on explaining it to the entire satisfaction of themselves and of the very few people who wanted to listen.

III

That was the position when our subject made his double discovery, that his eyesight was normal and that the population of these islands were mostly fools. (Both these discoveries are undated, but I think we may take them as occurring not long after 1856, in which year Mr. Shaw was born in Dublin. I am aware that News from Nowhere did not make its appearance until 1890, fourteen years after Mr. Shaw came to London, and a year later

than *Fabian Essays*.) I think it probable that a third discovery antedated these two by a little, and that was our subject's discovery that he was a good hand at an explanation ; indeed, if it were the custom to record as religiously the first words of great men as it is their last—a custom which presents unfortunate difficulties since there is no way of knowing a great man in his cradle—we may be pretty sure that the first words of our subject would prove to be, "Let me explain." Once more, whether this were so or whether this were not so (and it is a domestic scene which, if it occurred, Mr. Shaw has omitted unaccountably from his so carefully presented reminiscences), we should be inclined to deduce it from our subject's work in general ; in which, whether dramatic or extra-dramatic, no three words have enjoyed more frequent recurrence. For every reason, then, of destination and of choice, the field of the political economist was open to our subject. He found it for the first time in the history of English letters an arena in which a man who was bent upon catching the eye of his generation might seriously think of succeeding. Ruskin had Thackeray to thank for a good deal when he found Unto this Last too shocking for the Cornhill ; but Ruskin wrote before the Socialists had rendered the explana-

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tions of the orthodox economists really interesting to the general public, and he had made his name in other fields before he turned to teaching political economy to young ladies' academies and to long-suffering and hypothetical working men. It is impossible to assert that the physiocratic sentimentalism of Ruskin, in spite of the eloquence of its expression, has very much influence in England at this moment. But our subject found in the orthodox economist a prime instance of the "hopelessly private person" for whom, doubtless by nature, he had an antipathy. He found a sufficient number of persons—shall we say that he found the newspapers?—willing to give their attention to the phenomenon of the Socialists turning upon the system of society the guns they had wrested from the hands of its trusted if neglected defenders, the economists. He found within his own person an exceptional brain, quite equal to doing rather better in any field of public activity than it chose than most of its contemporaries. Add to this a severe and dutiful sobriety of character which religiously kept that brain working when the nearest rivals among those contemporaries happened to be taking a holiday; and a gift of "effective assertion" (which is our subject's definition

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of style), a gift already disciplined to the writing of his quartette of voluble novels. And add to this again the artless pleasure of the undergraduate in mere ratiocination. What better field for these things to cut a figure in, in the English 'eighties at any rate, than that of the economists? Our subject soon was busy cutting it. Within a very small number of years he was delivering an address to the Economic Section of the British Association—putting them into their own corner, as it were, and saying, "Let me explain."

IV

It is not without significance that what Mr. Shaw undertook to explain to the economists was *The Transition to Social Democracy*, for that is what the members of The Fabian Society have been explaining to one another ever since. I do not wish, in saying this, to be misunderstood. The Fabian Society, a body of persons of both sexes who have met together once a fortnight for a quarter of a century to listen to Mr. Shaw, and have left before his speech was over if the duration of its interest conflicted with the departure of their train for the suburbs, are only of significance to the subject of our present study in so far as their

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history is his history. In themselves, and apart from the admirable special activities of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb and others of the platform figures, they may be described as the passionate friends of the unreality of the economist. For a quarter of a century they have discussed how they will behave, how we shall all behave, how they will allow us to behave, "under Socialism." It is an amiable hobby, like another, and they have pursued it with the diligent single-mindedness with which another body of persons might discuss how vegetables behave under glass. I propose to assert that Mr. Shaw the borough councillor, the apostle of the cart and trumpet, the cogent advocate of municipal trading, has all the time been a sufferer from the unreality of the economist. He cleared the economists out of their corner just as, later on, he cleared the dramatists out of the theatre, and for the same reason—to make room for some goods of his own which he had all ready for delivery. For the unreality of the orthodox economists he substituted, in the name of reality, a new unreality; just as for the unreality of the orthodox dramatists he went on to substitute, in the name of reality, a new unreality again. But we must not get on too fast.

What is, in actual fact, the outcome of our

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subject's series of treatises—the *Fabian Essays* of 1889, *The Impossibilities of Anarchism*, *Socialism for Millionaires*, *Socialism and Superior Brains*, *Fabianism and the Empire*, *Fabianism and the Fiscal Question*, *The Commonsense of Municipal Trading*, *The Case for Equality* of 1914 ?

It is a very delightful series, displaying at every point the tongue of the ready debater as well as the pen of the ready writer. In the series, one would say, lives the athletic charm of our subject's public figure, as it has talked down to its generation from a hundred platforms. That, in itself, is very delightful. One is sure that the series has been read by very many people who have not read any other kind of economist at all. They have imbibed a very great deal of perfectly sound economic theory, and they have not imbibed any nonsense. Our subject's first effort in this particular field was to offer a pronounced opposition to the theory of Marx ; partly, no doubt, moved by an instinct to throw out of the field the biggest occupying figure he found in it ; partly because our subject has at any time given really very little quarter to other people's nonsense. On the subject of Value, he threw out Marx and allied himself to the late Mr. Stanley Jevons, an

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orthodox economist. This annoyed the Socialists ; but Mr. Shaw has always delighted in annoying those people whose attachment to an idea is by means of a sentiment. Along this line, if it were any part of our immediate business, we might discover in him a great deal of æsthetic as well as intellectual integrity. He annoyed the friends of the little peoples by his advocacy, because of its superior efficiency, of British ascendancy in South Africa ; when the Americanized trust then known as the Times Book Club promised superior efficiency, he annoyed the friends of the freedom of letters by giving the enterprise his support. In fact, I suppose our subject has always been more than anything else in love with efficiency. "Become efficient at your own particular trade or profession," has been his advice to the young Fabians, "and then tell everyone you are a Socialist." That has been his policy of peaceful permeation ; in contradistinction to the jolly umbrella-shaking of Mr. Hyndman amongst the lions in Trafalgar Square, and the distinguished hidalgoism of Mr. Cunninghame Graham in the same setting. It is advice with which it is not possible to quarrel.

And our subject's love of efficiency is the real reason why he dislikes the poor so much.

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The one actual outcome of all these treatises—oh yes, and of a round dozen of prefaces which I haven't forgotten—is our subject's intense dislike for the poor. That is something new in the science of political economy. Because it is a very early utterance which remains absolutely personal and characteristic, I propose to quote here a fairly long passage from the *Fabian Essays* :

But indeed the more you degrade the workers, robbing them of all artistic enjoyment, and all chance of respect and admiration from their fellows, the more you throw them back, reckless, on the one pleasure and the one human tie left to them—the gratification of their instinct for producing fresh supplies of men. You will applaud this instinct as divine until at last this excessive supply becomes a nuisance : there comes a plague of men ; and you suddenly discover that the instinct is diabolic, and set up a cry of “over population.” But your slaves are beyond caring for your cries : they breed like rabbits ; and their poverty breeds filth, ugliness, dishonesty, disease, obscenity, drunkenness and murder. In the midst of the riches which their labour piles up for you, their misery rises up too and stifles you. You withdraw in disgust to the other end of the town, from them ; you set your life apart from theirs by every class barrier you can devise ; and yet they swarm about you still : your face gets stamped with your habitual loathing and suspicion of them : your

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ears get so filled with the language of the vilest of them that you break into it when you lose your self-control : they poison your life as remorselessly as you have sacrificed theirs heartlessly. You begin to believe intensely in the devil. Then comes the terror of their revolting ; the drilling and arming of bodies of them to keep down the rest ; the prison, the hospital, paroxysms of frantic coercion, followed by paroxysms of frantic charity. And in the meantime, the population continues to increase !

And to place against that passage, for your edification, I give you another from the preface to the *Major Barbara* of nearly twenty years later :

Now what does this Let Him Be Poor mean ? It means let him be weak. Let him be ignorant. Let him become a nucleus of disease. Let him be a standing exhibition and example of ugliness and dirt. Let him have rickety children. Let him be cheap and let him drag his fellows down to his price by selling himself to do their work. Let his habitations turn our cities into poisonous congeries of slums. Let his daughters infect our young men with the diseases of the streets and his sons revenge him by turning the nation's manhood into scrofula, cowardice, cruelty, hypocrisy, political imbecility, and all the other fruits of oppression and malnutrition. Let the undeserving become still less deserving ; and let the deserving lay up for himself, not treasures in heaven, but horrors in

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hell upon earth. This being so, is it really wise to let him be poor? Would he not do ten times less harm as a prosperous burglar, incendiary, ravisher or murderer, to the utmost limits of humanity's comparatively negligible impulses in these directions? Suppose we were to abolish all penalties for such activities, and decide that poverty is the one thing we will not tolerate—that every adult with less than, say, £365 a year, shall be painlessly but inexorably killed, and every hungry half-naked child forcibly fattened and clothed, would not that be an enormous improvement on our existing system, which has already destroyed so many civilizations, and is visibly destroying ours in the same way?

Now the voice of those two utterances is demonstrably the same voice, which has gone on saying the same things with an iteration which cannot possibly be condemned. It is the voice, I think, of a man who does not like our old world at all, who pushes it away with the tips of gloved fingers, with the request that it will kindly make itself clean and tidy before presenting itself again for attention. It is a voice that is attenuated, almost into shrillness, by its burden of æsthetic disgust. How enormously (we may conceive that voice saying) how enormously much more I should like you people if you presented a uniform face; a face, above all, that was uniformly

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clean ! Blanche Sartorius, in Mr. Shaw's first play, spoke in much this tone when she said : " Oh, I hate the poor. At least, I hate those dirty, drunken, disreputable people who live like pigs." And in one of the latest of Mr. Shaw's plays—the play which was on no longer ago than the other day—one of the statements of a quarter of a century earlier was illustrated : the statement that our ears get so filled with the language of the vile that we break into it when we lose our self-control.

But it is the message, and not the tone, of the voice which is to the point for the moment. The way to a uniform cleanness of face and of character is by means of a uniform income. That is Mr. Shaw's economico-psychologic discovery. That is the actual outcome of our subject's series of treatises. It is hinted at in *Fabian Essays*¹ ; it is presented for Mr. Mallock's consideration in *Socialism and*

¹ At that point in Mr. Shaw's second essay at which it is suggested that "rent of managerial ability might in course of time become negative," that is to say that the manager should receive *less* for his work than the artisan, the captain less than the cabin-boy, because, "under Socialism," of the honour of superior service. That, in the precise spirit of the undergraduate who suggests to his tutor in political economy that interest should be negative—that is to say, a payment demanded for capital conserved instead of a payment conceded for capital used—is the genesis of Mr. Shaw's discovery.

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Superior Brains ; it is affirmed in the preface to *Major Barbara* ; it is reaffirmed in *The Case for Equality*. Incomes for All is the one positive contribution to the science of political economy made by our subject. It is the Shavian theory of distribution, as you might say the Jevonian theory of value or the Ricardian theory of rent. It is the categorical alternative to Let Him Be Poor. It is the means by which "all the detestable fruits of inequality of condition" (see *The Impossibilities of Anarchism*) are to be nipped off in the bud.¹

¹ If this were primarily an economic study we might pause to see how Mr. Shaw has proved himself to be, with this single exception, an orthodox economist ; or rather, an orthodox economist with a Socialist bias—with the orthodox Socialist bias. For example, we might read in our Mill : "To make the public pay much that the treasury may receive a little, is not an eligible mode of obtaining a revenue. In the case of manufactured articles the doctrine involves a palpable inconsistency. The object of the duty as a means of revenue, is inconsistent with its affording, even incidentally, any protection. It can only operate as protection in so far as it prevents importation ; and to whatever degree it prevents importation, it affords no revenue." Now that is precisely what Mr. Shaw himself has put forward from one thousand platforms ; it has been taken to be one of his daringly sudden simplifications. That, for example, among other things, is *Fabianism and the Fiscal question*. . . . But this is not primarily an economic study. It will not be irrelevant to have noted here our subject's pleasure in making any kind of a point, whether it is his own or another's ; for that, in its essence, is the debater's pleasure. He has done nothing as a constructive economist to be compared with Mr. J. A. Hobson's analysis of the industrial system, for example.

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V

What the Fabians discovered, in actual fact, was that it was much more amusing to talk about Socialism than to achieve it. That has very little to do with Quintus Fabius; but we need not trouble ourselves about that. I think it was Mr. Chesterton who, having taken off his hat to our subject's superior brain, took it off again to the fact that our subject had devoted his superior brain to talking about drain-pipes. Now we may be all for taking off our hats to our subject, and yet not be unaware that he has enjoyed himself talking about drain-pipes. Mr. Shaw has enjoyed talking about everything. It is not as though Mr. Shaw particularly promised himself the pleasure of talking about something else, and gave it up in order to talk about drain-pipes from a stern sense of duty. The stern sense of duty is there plain enough in our subject, but I do seriously suggest that we see it in a better perspective if we admit that a drain-pipe is a peculiarly pleasant thing to juggle with to a man of Mr. Shaw's temperament. In the first place a drain-pipe is "real," a real solid fact, with no nonsensical romance about it; and in the second place there are very few men who

can balance a^d drain-pipe. No one would have expected the late Oscar Wilde, for example, to make a very good performance with a drain-pipe; and sure enough when at one point in his career he too caught the Fabian fever (for he was particularly impressionable, far more so than our subject), it was not drain-pipes that he wrote about, but the soul of man, "under Socialism."

The Soul of Man under Socialism has not hitherto, so far as one is aware, been regarded as a Fabian essay; but that is what it is in reality. For the moment, Wilde permitted himself the amusement of granting that Utopia had, indeed, been added to our dominions; and he made for himself in it, along with the other artists, a haven of artificial seclusion in which, with beautiful pens and fair white paper before him, the artist would sit down and would look out over a garden at the high wall which saved him from the rude stresses of a competitive world, and would produce—one may be quite sure, nothing. Now if Mr. Chesterton meant that Mr. Shaw would rather have written about the place of the artist "under Socialism" than about drain-pipes, I think he made a mistake. Did not Mr. Shaw himself write, as we shall find in the next chapter, an exposure of the current nonsense about artists being

degenerate ? If artists were not degenerate in the highly competitive and distressing year 1895, after having to put up with all but five years of what Mr. Shaw has asserted posterity will call "the wicked century," it is surely a fair inference that in our subject's opinion Utopia is not necessary on their account. As a matter of fact, our subject has steadfastly refused to talk any of the current nonsense about artists ; he has worn his hygienic mantle with the most complete absence of affectedness, and that is one of the most charming things about him. He has put on his gloves and balanced a drain-pipe, because—as he has said of the writing of prefaces—he *can*. And when he came to the writing of plays, he did not immediately drop his drain-pipe, as Wilde dropped his Utopianism and submitted himself to the impress of the highly competitive West End managers—he wrote plays about drain-pipes.

Our subject, then, has been happy with his drain-pipe : that is the precise spectacle presented by, let us say, *The Commonsense of Municipal Trading*. If he had not been happy, we should not have read it ; and I suppose we all have done that. But while Mr. Shaw has been busy explaining—with the aid of a great deal of sound economic theory, with a wit which refuses to be frowned off the field of the

dullards, and with an incurable zest in the mere processes and triumphs of debate—the precise advantages of the fact that our drain-pipes have been municipalized, he has talked himself into a curious delusion. He has talked himself into the delusion that all this time he has been “pointing out” and “clearing up” he has escaped the unreality of the other economists. Of Life he has said, “Only by intercourse with men and women can we learn anything about it”—with the obvious implication that it is by this means that he himself has learned all about Life. And yet it is the hard fact that the Fabian Society and the cart and trumpet are not intercourse with men and women in the completest of possible senses. If we were to take our subject at his own valuation, he would appear as one of those who, in Plato’s phrase, “have gained a knowledge of each thing in its reality.” By becoming elected to a Borough Council one gains a knowledge of a Borough Council in its reality, and that is admirable; but one does not of necessity gain a knowledge of men and women other than Borough Councillors. I propose to point the reader to those passages quoted on pp. 32, 33, and to assert that they do not betray a knowledge of life gained primarily by intercourse with men and women. I will

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even go so far as to say that they are the words of a man to whom any kind of ordinary mixed public intercourse—say, at the Oval, or at a Socialist meeting, unless he were on the platform—would be extremely distasteful. The fact is that our subject is a platform figure, whose principal intercourse with men and women, we should say from his works, has been by means of talking about them.

VI

We shall find when we come to Mr. Shaw's plays, with their machinery of the preface, that his procedure is just what we should expect. It is an *a priori* procedure, from the general to the particular ; from " the millions of poor people, dirty people, abject people," for example, of whom one reads in the preface to *Major Barbara*, to West Ham, and not vice versa. It is as though Mr. Shaw, having written a letter to The Times establishing that poverty is a crime, had then paid a visit to a Salvation Army shelter, and found there everything which he had expected to find. His observation, that is to say, does not begin with Rummy Mitchens, and Snobby Price, and Bill Walker ; it begins in the economist's own corner, and only condescends, in a humorous

and delightful manner, to make itself concrete in Rummy and Snobby and Co. And now perhaps it will be as well to substitute for the word "economist" the word "publicist." Our subject has only sometimes been the economist, he has been the publicist all the time. In one sense, of course, every artist is a publicist; if he does not find his matter in what people happen to be interested in, he hopes that people will happen to be interested in his matter. But the true publicist, whether he is an artist or not, wants to be interesting people in his own particular brand of goods all the time. If he is an artist, he will interest them by means of his art, and he will want to interest them outside of his art as well—by means of his opinions on every conceivable subject, by means of his personality and person, by means even of the fact that his telegraphic address is "Socialist, London." We may as well sum it all up by saying, as our subject has done, "I want to change the ideas of the people of this country." How that desire and aim consorts with artistic principles, how, indeed, it conditions them, we shall better understand when we have devoted a chapter to the æsthetics of our subject. But the difference between Mr. Shaw and, let us say, Mr. Conrad, is apparent; Mr. Conrad who, when his books have spoken

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for him, really has nothing else that he particularly wants to tell us, or Mr. James, who has no views at all, positively no views at all that any reader ever discovered, but only a view of the world. The first kind of artist (he who is not consciously a publicist) does not understand the second kind of artist; Mr. Conrad has expressed this mistrust in his ironic tale of *The Informer*. "Does a man of that—of that—persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed, for instance? Does he lay his head on the pillow, pull his bedclothes over him, and go to sleep with the necessity of the *chambardement général*, as the French slang has it, of the general blow-up, always present to his mind? And if so, how can he?" Our subject is not an anarchist—has he not pointed out, and explained, and generally and sufficiently cleared up, the impossibility of being one? But our subject is all for the *chambardement général*—oh yes, a purely intellectual blow-up, a change of ideas. For he is a humane man, who even though he wishes that the adult poor might be "inexorably" killed, is yet careful to explain that the thing should be "painlessly" done, and the orphans forcibly fattened. . . . That is the kind of thing we must conceive our subject as taking to bed with him, and giving voice to,

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with pathos, with humour, and with a variety of effective assertion, the next morning. He is a man "of that—of that—persuasion."

There is a penalty for being a publicist, and that penalty is the publicist's unreality. It would be perfectly easy to define the unreality of the publicist, to go on defining it (for that is what, if it amounts to anything, this chapter amounts to); but what is the use, since Hazlitt has done it already, far better than anyone else could possibly do it, in his character of Mr. Cobbett? That passage from *On Knowledge of the World* may well stand at the end of this chapter:

As I have brought Mr. Cobbett in here by the neck and shoulders [says Hazlitt], I may add that I do not think he belongs properly to the class, either of philosophical speculators, or men of the world. He is a political humorist. He is too much taken up with himself either to attend to right reason or to judge correctly of what passes around him. He mistakes strength of purpose and passion, not only for truth, but for success. Because he can give fifty good reasons for a thing, he thinks it not only *ought* to be, but *must* be. Because he is swayed so entirely by his wishes and humours, he believes others will be ready to give up their prejudices, interests and resentments to oblige him. He persuades himself that he is the fittest person to represent Westminster in Parliament, and he considers this point (once

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proved) tantamount to his return. He knows no more of the disposition or sentiments of the people of Westminster than of the inhabitants of the moon (except from what he himself chooses to say or write of them), and it is this want of sympathy which, as much as anything, prevents his being chosen. The exclusive force and bigotry of his opinions deprives them of half their influence and effect, by allowing no toleration to others, and consequently setting them against him. . . .

A knowledge of mankind . . . is less an intellectual acquirement than a natural disposition. . . .

I do not know whether that gave the picture of Mr. Cobbett to his contemporaries : it most certainly gave, and gives, the picture of one kind of man. It gives the picture of the publicist. One would not wish to make too much of the comparison ; when one thinks of the subject of this study as a kind of social institution, as it were, one thinks of Godwin at least as often as one thinks of Cobbett. But perhaps he is, as near as we can get to him, the Mr. Cobbett of his age—that Mr. Cobbett of the pure and trenchant English style who wondered how *Paradise Lost* could have been tolerated by a people conversant with astronomy, navigation, and chemistry, and who found some things in Shakespeare to please him but much more that he did not like ; that

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Mr. Cobbett who was as well known as any man in England, down to the minutest circumstances in his character, habits, and opinions, including the colour of his waistcoat. Mr. Shaw has never stood for Westminster, but he has stood for St. Pancras for the County Council. And if one searched one's mind and heart for a phrase to cover those activities of our subject which this present chapter has feebly and hopelessly limped after, "political humorist" would be the phrase one would come back to. "Because he can give fifty good reasons for a thing, he thinks it not only ought to be, but must be."

III

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I

IF we have some sort of a perception then, however rudimentary, of that "economic basis" on which our subject has reared his master-works, and of which he has never tired of speaking, we may fairly consider we have come in on the ground floor, and begin to look out at the windows. It is a wide prospect that is presented, the whole of which has been submitted by our subject to a kind of cadastral survey. Our subject has surveyed mankind from the Balkans to the Far West, he has associated on familiar terms with Napoleon after Lodi, with Burgoyne before Saratoga, with Cæsar in Egypt, with Shakespeare at Whitehall, and he has personally conducted a party of tourists from Richmond to Hell. At least two visions of Heaven he has given us, one (in the essay on Church-Going, and again from the lips of Tom Broadbent) "a drawing-room in blue tabinet" and one the dream of a madman. He has written novels

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in his nonage, essays in philosophic criticism in the lustiness of his manhood, plays in his maturity, and prefaces all the time. He has made spirited personal sorties against the materialism of Marx and of Darwin, and has lived to enjoy the spectacle of a world "seething with the reaction of Ibsen's ideas." He has run with the Nietzschean hares, and hunted with the anti-Nietzschean hounds. He has explained the Wagnerian movement in music in terms of economic allegory. And goodness alone knows what he has not done to the collectivist movement in politics, ethics and sociology! There is only one word for him, and that is the word of the hero of the anti-romantic comedy: "What a man! *What a man!*"

Now if we were to take some of these activities of our subject, and call them artistic, and to take other activities of our subject, and call them extra-artistic, we should be doing something which might be all very well in the case of another man—(Sterne, for example, who was a preacher of sermons on Sundays and a receiver of secular sensations on every other day of the week; or Mr. Walkley, who is an assistant to Mr. Hobhouse when he is not giving to the drama's patrons the drama's laws)—but which would not be the thing in the case of our

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subject at all. For all the time he has been one man, doing the same thing; and that is the secret—the often very well-kept secret—of his sincerity. The one thing he has been doing is changing the ideas of the people of this country; and that is a man's job for a lifetime, with quite enough employment to keep him from going off duty.

As a matter of fact, our subject has nothing at all to say for a kind of art which does not concern itself with a change of ideas. That has led him into some strange positions: into saying that Sophocles was a great artist, for example, *because* he wrote about incest; and into claiming that Monsieur Brioux is the equal of Molière on the ground that *La Foi* and *Les Avariés* are exercises in "the highest function that man can perform." But in general our subject's position is clear; he has told us himself. (He has always told us himself!) "I have, I think," he says, "always been a Puritan in my attitude towards Art. I am as fond of fine music and handsome building as Milton was, or Cromwell, or Bunyan; but if I found that they were becoming the instruments of a systematic idolatry of sensuousness, I would hold it good statesmanship to blow every cathedral in the world to pieces with dynamite, organ and all,

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without the least heed to the screams of the art critics and cultured voluptuaries." That is one of the most celebrated of our subject's utterances, and we may behold in it the *chambarde-ment général* again. Mr. Shaw, in the name of good statesmanship, in the name of good morals, in the name of good economics, has blown all sorts of cathedrals to pieces, organ and all. Fortunately for us, they have generally been bad cathedrals, for Mr. Shaw's critical sense, so long as it has been happily employed with the dynamite, has been tolerably unerring. It is in the cathedrals that have been set up in the name of good statesmanship, in the name of good morals, in the name of good economics, in the name of the religion of the future, in the name of anything but good art, and that have received his consecration, that the trouble comes in. Take the theatre for example—he blew the commercially stereotyped idolatry of silly sensuousness out of that pretty effectively, more effectively than any man of his generation (not that it is not still there); but he did it in order to open it to some strange kind of things in the name of the drama. But we shall come to all that presently.

Observe, for the moment, our subject the Puritan treading his way through the decadent 'nineties. The Time Spirit was strong then, we

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are told—strong as the dying hold of a drowning man. Our subject did not cry for madder music and for stronger wine ; he explained the economic basis of the Ring of the Niblungs, and pointed out the comparative intoxicative values in the art of the age of brandy, lager beer, and tea. He was not desolate and sick of any old passion ; but he gave in to the Time Spirit at last, and wrote an essay for the Savoy. And the title of that essay was *On Going to Church*. It was a thoroughly Puritan essay.

II

Perhaps it is always the part of the Puritan to assist in confusing the age-long contention between science and art. You may find out the man who is not an artist, Mr. Shaw has said, by his habit of regarding Art as a “quaint and costly ring in the nose of Nature.” But Art, if you come to think of it, *is* rather like a quaint and costly ring in the nose of Nature—to the Puritan. Nature herself can do very well without it. The true Puritan demand went to America with the Mayflower, and has flourished there ever since : it is that you should “deliver the goods.” Nature delivers her goods ; she is not in the least like a poem on Nature. Nature was the first Puritan ; and the Souldier’s

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Catechisme of Cromwell, which presents the bare words of command and reply, is a more typically Puritan work than *The Pilgrim's Progress*. If Bunyan had been more of a Puritan than an artist he would have written a primer on the Christian ethic. For is not the scientific primer the archetype of Puritan literary expression? It says what has to be said, and is not all else vanity of vanities? It delivers the goods. What is there to be said, in strict Puritanism, for the Tolstoyan "infection"? What is there, in particular, that can possibly differentiate it from the stimulative effect of drinking a cup of tea, a noggin of brandy, or a glass of lager beer? Mr. Shaw asserted in the essay on Church-Going that he could do without these things; but then, art is a thing we could do perfectly well without. It is the first of the statutory luxuries. Mr. Shaw himself, as we have seen, who has ever been a lover of art, would himself forgo it instantly at the behest of good statesmanship. Is not the demand that the facts of the primer, the assertions of the catechism, should have form "put on them"—is not that a weakness of the flesh, a giving into softness, tantamount precisely to the tea-drinking? John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, we should say, is better art than Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health*,

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With a Key to the Scriptures; but the readers of the latter work, who are in a state of exaltation to begin with, do not say so. They do not want to be infected by the literary power of the artist before they can surrender themselves to receive the goods which the writer has to deliver. The Puritan should surely refuse every stimulant, on the demonstrable ground that he *can* refuse it. And is not the form of a work of art simply the most demonstrable stimulant and grant in aid to his receptive faculties which the Puritan will find if he keeps on looking for a week of Sundays ?

These are questions for the Puritan to answer. It will be enough for our present purpose if their mere posing has served to suggest the direction in which we may look for our subject's æsthetic theory, and the nature of the basis on which the whole superstructure of his creative works has been reared.

Let us take first the question of style. Now style, to our Puritan, is, in itself, something quite abhorrent : to find pleasure in the style of a work of art as apart from its meaning is as intolerable as to find pleasure in marriage as apart from its offspring. The purpose of marriage, as Mr. Shaw has asserted on one thousand occasions, is the procreation of children : the Book of Common Prayer, in

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affirming its secondly and thirdly (and particularly its secondly), is a pandar compared to him. And the purpose of art, as Mr. Shaw has asserted on one thousand further occasions, is the procreation of ideas : art is "the living word of a man delivering a message to his own time." It therefore comes about, in the most natural manner in the world, that to Mr. Shaw the question of style is the question of effective assertion. And that, so to speak, is not a question at all ; it admits of no question. If you have anything to say to your time, if you have any goods to deliver, the value of the manner of delivery will be the value of the goods, one and inseparable. In a word, "Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style." But let us have the whole passage. It is from the vehemently Puritanical epistle by means of which *Man and Superman* was dedicated to Mr. Walkley, and let us hope in passing that Mr. Walkley enjoyed it :

No doubt I must recognize [says our subject], as even the Ancient Mariner did, that I must tell my story entertainingly if I am to hold the wedding guest spellbound in spite of the siren sounds of the loud bassoon. But "for art's sake" alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence. I know that there are men who, having nothing to say and nothing

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to write, are nevertheless so in love with oratory and with literature that they delight in repeating as much as they can understand of what others have said or written aforetime. I know that the leisurely tricks which their want of conviction leaves them free to play with the diluted and misapprehended message supply them with a pleasant parlour game which they call style. I can pity their dotage and even sympathize with their fancy. But a true original style is never achieved for its own sake : a man may pay from a shilling to a guinea, according to his means, to see, hear, or read another man's act of genius ; but he will not pay with his whole life and soul to become a mere virtuoso in literature, exhibiting an accomplishment which will not even make money for him, like fiddle playing. Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style. He who has nothing to assert has no style and can have none : he who has something to assert will go as far in power of style as its momentousness and his conviction will carry him. . . .

Now if it were any part of the intention of this present slight book—as it is not—to go through all that our subject has ever said and to substitute our opinion for his own in regard to some sentence of it, it might at this point be asserted, with or without style but certainly with conviction, that to have something to say is not at all the same thing as to have the power of saying it beautifully. Take the

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Speeches which our ministers make up, for example, and then foist upon the King to deliver; they have something perfectly plain to assert, but they do not always succeed in asserting it plainly. If they do not bristle with broken syntax as a wall with glass, they present, as likely as not, some other barrier equally insurmountable by those interested. Impossible to attribute the thing in every instance to a lack of conviction. The world is full of convinced political enthusiasts who do not speak beautifully, of convinced religious enthusiasts who do not preach beautifully, and of convinced taxpayers who do not write beautiful letters to *The Times*—as Mr. Shaw himself has done, on every occasion. (Those letters, in due time, will be well worth collecting: let us hope that his publishers will collect them.) And in every instance for the word beautiful you may substitute the word effective, without the smallest alteration in sense. But it is no part of this book's business, as I say, to provide a running commentary on the works of Mr. Shaw, or marginally to annotate them, as it were, with blessings and curses. It is our present intention to detect in those works the unifying voice of their creator, and not, as soon as he speaks, to out-shout him. And in the passage which has just been quoted there

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is to be heard, if you listen for it, the essential voice of our subject.

If you choose to call his characteristic manner of literary utterance his "style," then you have it there: you may observe the surface appearance of lucidity on the whole of it, and even on that sentence beginning, "I know that the leisurely tricks——", although, as a matter of fact, if you have not the spirit of good fortune at your elbow you will find yourself having to read that sentence three times before you make out its head from its tail. The sentences of our subject have sometimes this Trinculo-baiting quality (such is the power of their conviction). Of course our subject is a delightfully good writer, with no nonsense about him. But there is a particular nemesis which attends upon the writer who aims at an exterior appearance of extreme lucidity, and that is the achievement of an ultimate effect which is the negation of lucidity. In Mr. Shaw's case it is entirely a consequence of his desire to sweep us along; and sweep us along he does, although at the end of the journey we are not always quite perfectly clear as to the details of the country through which he has carried us. For example, when we read in *The Revolutionist's Handbook*:

The mere transfiguration of institutions, as from military and priestly dominance to commercial and

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scientific dominance, from commercial dominance to proletarian democracy, from slavery to serfdom, from serfdom to capitalism, from monarchy to republicanism, from polytheism to monotheism, from monotheism to atheism, from atheism to pantheistic humanitarianism, from general illiteracy to general literacy, from romance to realism, from realism to mysticism, from metaphysics to physics, are all but changes from Tweedledum to Tweedledee: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*

—when we read that, a sentence which might be recognized at sight as from the pen of our subject, we are aware that words are not merely being thrown about (as in the case of another writer we might have suspected), but we are equally aware, if we pause at just that point for our breath to rejoin us, that our revolutionist no more subscribes to our grammar than he subscribes to the rest of our conventions. Sometimes it is a metaphor which evades us, as in the flight in which the respective qualities of Shakespeare's Cæsar and Mr. Shaw's are made clear to us :

The tragedy of disillusion and doubt, of the agonized struggle for a foothold on the quicksand made by an observation striving to verify its vain attribution of morality and respectability to Nature, of the faithless will and the keen eyes that the faithless will is too weak to blind : all this will give you a

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Hamlet or a Macbeth, and win you great applause from literary gentlemen ; but it will not give you a Julius Cæsar.

There are moments, then, in Mr. Shaw's writing which one expects are all right ; but whether they are all right or not may be left to the decision of the literary gentlemen. In his zeal for effective assertion, our subject does not always spare us some hardship. It is a case of he who runs may write, and we who read must perforce run after him. If this were the proper place for it, we might note a similarly occasional hardship inflicted on the excellent people whose business and pleasure it is to speak our subject's prose in the theatres. " It will lay his wife's life waste," is what Sir Patrick Ridgeon has to say at a critical juncture ; and one remembers with indulgence the actor who rendered that with several hard-won variants.

But these are merely the occasional defects of a style whose qualities are frankly dialectical, and, interesting as might prove complete essays on the Shavian antithesis and a Shavian conjunction, the present chapter is no place for them. For now that I have put down on paper that passage dedicated to Mr. Walkley, it is clear to me that it really has all sorts of

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ramifications, some of which lead quite immediately into the business we are considering. Take, for instance, the admission of Mr. Shaw that he must tell his story, that he must deliver his goods, "entertainingly." You will remember the advice given to Don Juan later on in the play which, in the author's good time, comes after the epistle: the advice that he should "put his philosophy in the form of entertaining anecdotes." Now it is not without significance that that advice is given by the Devil. For if we have not been wrong in our reading of his character, the Puritan does regard the need to be entertaining as the Devil. The place where such advice was given was not the lowest depth of Hell; the lowest depth of the Puritan's æsthetic Hell is where art is made entertaining for art's sake, and you will observe that here it is art which is to be made entertaining for philosophy's sake—a very different thing. But still it is, in strictest Puritanism, Hell all the same. For how keenly would the Puritan like to deliver the goods without the silver paper, the philosophy without the anecdote!—only he dare not do it, for fear that the assertion would not be "effective." It is like selling a portion of his own soul, and he doesn't want to do it. In consequence the Puritan sells just that neces-

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sary portion, and keeps a good tight hold on the rest. That, really, is the explanation of all kinds of things. It is the explanation of Mr. Shaw's prefaces, in which he is keeping tight hold of his own soul and hating to surrender it until the very last moment to the indignity of impersonal utterance in the dramatic form ; it is the explanation of how, even then, he never does quite surrender it ; it is the explanation, finally, of why the creative works of our subject are somehow all secondary to the utterances in his own person. To put on the form of art is the last indignity, in strict reasoning, to the message which Puritanism has to deliver ; and that is why the plays of Mr. Shaw never quite put it on, as we shall find in a subsequent chapter.

III

To go back to our passage. We have established the contention, for what it is worth, that to the Puritan the condescension from explicit to implicit utterance does not come easily. It is really the second fall. It is a case of *infacilis est descensus Averno*. We are able to appreciate the point of view, although not yet in its full significance, from which the plays of Mr. Shaw are seen to be the plays of a man who

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wrote prefaces which no one would read. We may even glimpse him, with the assistance of that earlier chapter, as an over-serious man whose wit is the conscious and rather shame-faced reaction against his own over-seriousness. We have yet to follow up one more ramification from our subject's definition of style as effective assertion. Again it is in a direction which leads the true Puritan into self-scarification. But Mr. Shaw is a Utilitarian-Puritan. Having postulated that all that is necessary to the effective expression of one's message to one's time is a convinced belief in the originality and desirability of that message, he next proceeds to add a rider. It appears that to be convinced is after all not enough; you must also be irritating. "In this world," he says, "if you do not say a thing in an irritating way, you may just as well not say it at all, since nobody will trouble themselves about anything that does not trouble them." Now to be irritating may perfectly well be a Puritan virtue; it will at any rate be a consequence of Puritanism so long as there is a majority of non-Puritans in this world. But when the advice is here given to put your philosophy into an irritating form, it is not a case, as it was before, of the Devil being his own advocate. Here quite plainly it is the Utilitarian in Mr. Shaw—the

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Fabian if you like — peacefully permeating the Puritan. The Puritan Mr. Shaw knows that the pure milk of the word is enough ; but the Utilitarian Mr. Shaw says, “ Include an irritant whenever you get the opportunity.” We might say that the advice amounted to putting a drop of gin in the gingerbeer, if the metaphor were not too shocking in this connection. That anyhow is what Mr. Shaw has done, and the Utilitarian has squared it up with the Puritan. The probable line the Utilitarian took was to point out that, after all, the postulate may be taken to include the rider ; there can be no true effectiveness of assertion, that is to say, without a measure of the irritating quality. The Utilitarian would have had no difficulty in putting forward tolerable analogies. There is Hazlitt’s defence of the writer, for example ; a defence on different ground, but against much the same charge of a lapse from absolute sincerity, extrinsic as well as intrinsic. “ A person,” he said, “ who does not endeavour to *seem* more than he *is*, will generally be thought nothing of. We habitually make such large deductions for pretence and imposture, that no merit will stand against them. It is necessary to set off our good qualities with a certain air of plausibility and self-importance, as some atten-

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tion to fashion is necessary to decency." Well, Mr. Shaw having settled his internal differences, made up his mind to set off his good qualities with a certain—a very certain—air of plausibility and self-importance. It need not be said that he made up his mind very early; quite at the beginning, indeed, of the public career we are studying.

On the other hand, there is David Copperfield. "It has always been in my observation of human nature," says David Copperfield, "that a man who has any good reason to believe in himself never flourishes himself before the faces of other people in order that they may believe in him." Mr. Shaw has yielded to no man in his admiration for Dickens (to be sure, an un-Puritanical admiration), but it cannot be too plainly asserted that in this respect Mr. Shaw is outside David Copperfield's observation of human nature. With the best of good reason to believe in himself, flourish himself before the face of other people in order that they may believe in him is just what he *has* done. That is the principal form his specific of irritation has taken. Indeed you might say that that is his style. But here the Puritan, who is never far from the Utilitarian's elbow, comes in again. The Utilitarian having conceded this trick of style—the air of plausi-

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bility and self-importance—in the interest of effectiveness of assertion, enters the Puritan to sanctify the concession; nay, to acclaim it. For in the act of irritation the Puritan has discovered not a grace or an expedient, but a *duty*. The Puritan is ready with a whole æsthetic of the shocking. You might imagine, at first glance, that Major Barbara's use of the sacred words or Eliza Doolittle's of the profane—to take two instances at random of what has been held in our subject's works to be shocking—was the work of the Utilitarian; that they were instances of the trick-shocking, things said in an irritating way, that is to say, on the theory that nobody would trouble themselves about Mr. Shaw's particular message if there was not something in the manner of that message's delivery to trouble them. But if you imagine that, the Puritan is soon at hand to enlighten you. It is for your *good*, you will learn, that those things are there. It is not merely good for you that your ear should be caught for the reception of Mr. Shaw's message, it is good for you to receive a shock, *quâ* shock. The Utilitarian and the Puritan are united again; the value of the goods and the value of their manner of delivery once more are one and inseparable.

“The difficulty on the stage at present is

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not to save audiences from being shocked, but to induce managers and actors to shock them when it is for their good and that of society that they should be shocked, as it generally is in England about three times a week on one subject or another.”¹ Sophocles, Molière, Wagner, Ibsen, Brieux, Strindberg, Mr. Shaw—all these distinguished writers are shockers in the strict and Puritan sense of that term. That was what our subject went to the room at Westminster prepared to assert “in an irritating way” to the little group of Parliamentary gentlemen who were sitting on the question of the English Dramatic Censor; and that was the Puritan æsthetic by which the Parliamentary gentlemen declined to be irritated. They refused to allow his fifty good reasons for the freedom of the theatre to go down on their minutes, and that is how we come to have the happiness of reading them in the form of a preface instead of in the form of a Blue Book.

IV

But if the happiness has not been Mr. Shaw's of contributing to a Blue Book, the happiness has been his, as a Puritan, of writing the

¹ The Solution of the Censorship Problem. *Academy*, June 29, 1907.

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scientific primer. He has delivered the goods. The primers of economics we have already glanced at, and there are also the primers of "philosophic criticism"—*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), *The Sanity of Art* (1895), *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898), and the weekly *Dramatic Opinions and Essays* reprinted from the *Saturday Review* (1895-8). In addition, every one of the prefaces is a scientific primer: a primer of marriage, a primer of medicine, a primer of politics, a primer of Shakespeare study, and so on. These, I have submitted, for what the theory is worth, are the direct delivery of Mr. Shaw's message to his own time, while the plays are that message's indirect and almost reluctant delivery. The primers and the prefaces are thus the favourite offspring of our subject, while the plays, since they are philosophy in the form of entertaining anecdotes, are the fruit of a composition with the Puritan's Devil. But the primers and the prefaces also contain, as we have seen, a concession to the weakness of the human flesh; they consent to address us in an irritating way, or, as we should prefer to say, they do not refuse to take their author's natural wit into alliance. Now that is very jolly. "If a habit of jesting lowers a man," says Hazlitt, "it is to the level of humanity."

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Our subject has altered the title of a famous picture, and appears as the Laughing Round-head. Perhaps he is the only Puritan in the history of that race who has adopted waggery as a medium. We may be very glad that he has infected us with his jollity ; certainly the momentousness of some of the things he has had to say to us, even when his conviction is added, would not have carried him so far if it were not for the natural wit which is part of his style—or, as he would prefer us to say, part of his power of effective assertion. But we have come to the point at which we have to look deeper for the evidence of the Puritan. With possibly some success we have reconciled the manner of the Puritan with the manner of the jester, and now it will be our business to look for the matter of the Puritan. That will not be nearly so difficult.

We have indulged a fancy that the real bent of the Puritan is towards science rather than towards art. Now it is a very remarkable thing that from the first moment Mr. Shaw began to talk about art he talked about it in terms of science. In the primer attached to his very first volume of plays (a primer of Himself) we find our subject deploring on Shakespeare's account that that dramatist "could not afford to pursue a genuinely

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scientific method in his studies of character and society." In the primer attached to his *Pleasant Plays* our subject included a passage which is so important to his proper understanding that I propose to reproduce it here :—

At all events [he said], I do not see moral chaos and anarchy as the alternative to romantic convention ; and I am not going to pretend I do merely to please the people who are convinced that the world is only held together by the force of unanimous, strenuous, eloquent, trumpet-tongued lying. To me the tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history.

And with that hint as to what he was driving at, our subject withdrew reluctantly and rang up the curtain.

Nor is this all. In the primer attached to *Man and Superman*, Mr. Shaw says, " Every man who records his illusions is providing data for the genuinely scientific psychology which the world still waits for. I plank down my view of the existing relations of men to women in the most highly civilized society," he goes on, " for what it is worth. It is a view like any other view and no more, neither true

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nor false, but, I hope, a way of looking at the subject which throws into the familiar order of cause and effect a sufficient body of fact and experience to be interesting to you [Mr. Walkley], if not to the playgoing public of London." In a word, "I am not a professional liar," as Mr. Shaw said in that earlier primer, the one attached to the American edition of *Love Among the Artists*.

The point for the moment is, however, our subject's widespread desire for a genuinely scientific this, a genuinely scientific that, and a genuinely scientific the other. I have given three instances, and I have no doubt that the reader will have no hesitation in providing himself, out of his own superior knowledge of our subject, with three dozen others. Mr. Shaw has very badly wanted, the whole of his life, to turn art into a science. And why has he wanted to do that? For the ordinary Puritan reason: that art for its own sake is a snare for the mind and a delusion to the senses. "The English cry of 'Amuse us: take things easily: dress up the world prettily for us,' seems mere cowardice to the strong souls that dare look facts in the face." You will remember what our subject was willing to do to the cathedrals, organs and all, in the name of good statesmanship; and there is no

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end to the *chambardement général* he will perform in the name of a genuinely scientific—that is to say, a genuinely Puritan—system of morals. He has taken down the sign of art for art's sake, and put up the sign of art for science's sake in its place. And what then is the enemy, to be attacked in this genuinely scientific manner? The enemy is Romance. "I am not a professional liar," says our subject, with the implication that that is what the other artists are—Sophocles, Molière, Bunyan, Hogarth, Wagner, Ibsen, Butler, Strindberg, Tolstoy, and some few others excepted. Romance is "the great heresy to be swept off from art and life—the food of modern pessimism and the bane of modern self-respect." And Idealism, "which is only a flattering name for romance in politics and morals," is as obnoxious to our subject as romance in ethics or religion. Away with them: forward with a genuinely scientific psychology.

How Mr. Shaw proceeded to put these principles into practice, with what skill he has put the Romantic Idealist into the position of the enemy and kept him there, in what degree he has managed to fall himself into the pit he had digged for his enemy, we shall read in a subsequent chapter. In the meantime we find

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our subject asserting, "The function of comedy is nothing less than the destruction of old-established morals." That is precisely what we should expect our subject to assert. What kind of a comedy that principle led to, what kind of a tragedy and comedy of life has lain in the sometimes terrible and sometimes ludicrous consequences of our persistent refusal to be genuinely scientific, it will be our business in due course to consider. But there is one other principle which has gone to make the shape of our subject's dramatic work, and I suppose the proper place for it is the present chapter.

V

A great deal has been made of the indebtedness of our subject to the late Samuel Butler ; but then a great deal has been made of the indebtedness of our subject to a good many people. The fact that the superman of our subject is not in the least like the superman announced by Zarathustra, the fact that the drama of our subject is not in the least like the drama of Ibsen, the fact that the philosophy of our subject is not in the least like the philosophy of Schopenhauer—all these facts will not for one moment put a stop to the current habit of putting forward Nietzsche, Ibsen or Schopen-

hauer as petitioning creditor in the alleged intellectual bankruptcy of our subject. And Mr. Shaw, on purely technical grounds, is not in the least like the late Samuel Butler, in that the late Samuel Butler put the whole of his satire into a single work of art while Mr. Shaw has never chosen to put the whole of his satire into a work of art, but has left the bulk of it hanging out in a preface. The late Samuel Butler planked down his view of the existing relations of men to women in the most highly civilized society in the form of a novel, and he called that novel *The Way of All Flesh*. If the whole of the Notebooks of Butler had never been published, it really would not have mattered to the completeness of our understanding of that view. But when our subject planks down his *Man and Superman*, the notebook at the end and the notebook at the beginning and the notebook in the middle are found to be really essential to our complete understanding. If anybody doubts that, he has only to remember the popular play of that name as performed in the theatres, with its unmistakable appearance of being a comedy which has left its philosophy in the cloak-room. Butler, that is to say, in so far as he was concerned with a "message," delivered that message in the form of a work of art, while Mr.

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Shaw has never quite brought himself to that ultimate betrayal of the Puritan principle. Mr. Shaw has confessed to the highest possible enjoyment of Butler, an enjoyment which he has done a great deal to bring this present generation to share. If any very portentous claim were to be marked out on Mr. Shaw's behalf around the view point from which he has regarded English society, it might be necessary to remark that the late Samuel Butler had been there before him. But if the question is that of "likeness" in method between the two writers, it is only possible to find them essentially and irretrievably divided. Between *The Way of All Flesh*, regarded as a novel, and *Man and Superman*, regarded as a play, there is all the difference between the satiric method which is implicit and the satiric method which is explicit; between the view of life which is "planked down," that is to say, in the sense that a plank may be built into a structure, and the view of life which is "planked down" in the sense that a plank may be one step to a platform.

If we must be in the fashion, however, and talk about likenesses, let us see how our subject (not is influenced by, or indebted to, but) has some points of contact with William Godwin, the inquirer concerning Political Jus-

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tice, and the father-in-law of the poet Shelley. The circumstance that both are by way of being novelists and dramatists, the one more of the one and the other more of the other, is the least part of the parallel. It is more to the point that both are rather reluctantly so, each in the intervals from being generally and calmly subversive. Godwin's "Beware of reverence" is extremely like the guiding principle of our subject. "Marriage as now understood," said Godwin, "is a monopoly and the worst of monopolies." And when he said, "Morality itself is nothing but a calculation of consequences," he really came very near to Mr. Shaw's "morals being mostly only social habits and circumstantial necessities" — an utterance which is to-day, I suppose, far more famous. But none of these things is the point. We come nearer the point when we remember the failure of Godwin's one excellent novel to achieve the implicit satire of things as they were which was its object. He actually called his novel *Things As They Are*, very much as Butler called his *The Way of All Flesh*; and posterity has called it ever since by its subtitle, which was *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. Now why has posterity called Godwin's quite excellent novel by its subtitle? Simply because the author's purpose—

which was, as he explained in a preface, to “comprehend a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man”—never quite succeeded in imposing itself on the narrative: it got left in the preface. The consequent occasional inassimilability of the narrative, due to the fact that the very explicit philosopher of Political Justice is not quite completely forgotten, is the sole reason why Caleb Williams is a fiction of the second rank. It is surprising that Mr. Shaw, whose eagerness to explain English literature to us has been at least the equal of his other eagernesses, has not, so far as one remembers, ever said anything about the author of Caleb Williams and his once even more celebrated Inquiry. Once again, however, our surprise at this circumstance is not the point: the sole and only point of which I wish to make anything at all in this connection is that Godwin did happen to enunciate quite perfectly the principle which has animated our subject in all his activities. He did not enunciate it as an æsthetic principle, but that is what our subject has made of it. From the blameless seclusion of his library Godwin looked out at the world and said: “What I should desire is, not by violence to change its institutions, but by

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discussion to change its ideas.” And from the blameless seclusion of his platform, that is exactly what our subject has said.

VI

You will read in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* of the consequences, sometimes terrible and sometimes ludicrous, of a conduct of life founded on the ideas which at present rule in the world. That work was the first, and it still is the principal, primer of that subject. But our purpose in turning to it at this precise point is not so much for general edification as for particular illumination. We want to know, I take it, just what our subject's major æsthetic principle amounts to in regard to the drama. When Mr. Shaw put his little work forward for the first time in the year 1891 he did so with a reminder that it was not a critical essay on the poetic beauties of Ibsen—(as this present slight book is, for example, a critical essay on the poetic beauties of Mr. Shaw)—but simply an exposition of Ibsenism ; or an exposition of just so much in Ibsen as suited Mr. Shaw's purposes, as we should prefer to say. When Mr. Shaw put the work forward for the second time in the year 1913, he newly completed it to the death of Ibsen and he played just the same trick upon him. He triumphantly found

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embedded in his subject, that is to say, not this time his own opinions in general (they remained as before) but the æsthetic principle on which he had written his own plays. He called the chapter in which he performed this feat *The Technical Novelty in Ibsen's Plays*. And this is the manner of it :—

This, then, is the extension of the old dramatic form effected by Ibsen. Up to a certain point in the last act, *A Doll's House* is a play that might be turned into a very ordinary French drama by the excision of a few lines, and the substitution of a sentimental happy ending for the famous last scene : indeed the very first thing the theatrical wiseacres did with it was to effect exactly this transformation, with the result that the play thus pithed had no success and attracted no notice worth mentioning. But at just that point in the last act, the heroine very unexpectedly (by the wiseacres) stops her emotional acting and says : “ We must sit down and discuss all this that has been happening between us.” And it was by this new technical feature : this addition of a new movement, as musicians would say, to the dramatic form, that *A Doll's House* conquered Europe and founded a new school of dramatic art.

Now it would be perfectly possible, indeed it would be the easiest thing in the world, to say several things at this point. It would be easy, for example, to point out that since Nora's next

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remark is that this is their first discussion in eight years, *all* of Mr. Shaw's plays cannot possibly consist of discussion without running the Technical Novelty to disaster. It would be even easier to ask, since the scene between Isabella and Claudio in the prison or Orlando and Rosalind's interchange of remarks in the forest is certainly, each in its separate kind, a "discussion," in what respect the Technical Novelty is a novelty. One might even assert, with a reasonable expectation of escaping contradiction, that *A Doll's House* happens to be a play which as logically requires this particular discussion for its artistic completion as the preparations of the hen require to eventuate in the egg. The story of Torvald and Nora is a story whose climax is a discussion as inevitably as the story of Othello and Desdemona is a story whose climax is a murder. It is no more sensible to say that all plays must be discussions because *A Doll's House* is a play about a discussion, than it would be to say that all plays must be about murders because Othello is a play about a murder. . . . But we will assert none of these things. We happen not to be discussing the point with our subject, but noting his own triumphant discovery of it. The drama *is* discussion. It is discussion with one end and one only, and that end is a public change of ideas. Its word is Pistol's :

“Discuss unto me.” That is what Mr. Shaw has lived for, and worked for, and jested for, and sold himself to the Puritan’s Devil for. That is why Mr. Shaw has addressed us from a thousand platforms, including the theatre platform. That, indeed, is the reason why Mr. Shaw had to carry that particular platform at the point of the pen snatched from the hand of the inert dramatic critics : to wrest it from the amusement-caterers, from all the horde of professional liars, and to devote it to its high and sacred purpose. In the light of that discovery, we do not any longer hesitate to understand the sense in which the function of comedy is the destruction of old-established morals. It is no longer with surprise that we hear that Shakespeare was a poor sort of a dramatist, with much to show and nothing to teach—not one, in a word, of the artist-philosophers. Do we not read in this same primer, newly completed as it is to the death of Ibsen, that Othello “would be a prodigiously better play if it were a serious discussion of the highly interesting problem of how a simple Moorish soldier got on with a supersubtle Venetian lady of fashion if he married her” ? We do. And with *that* hint as to what our subject has been driving at, we really may withdraw and let him ring up his curtain.

IV

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MR. SHAW'S novels are four, and Mr. Shaw's plays are twenty-seven up to the present. His novels are not marked by any of the specific qualities which are held in our day to distinguish the modern novel; nor are his plays marked by any of the specific qualities which are held to distinguish the modern play. But when we have said that we are only at the beginning of the task of this present chapter, and not at the end of it.

I

It has been a favourite thing with the latter-day publicists to assert that the only reason why all the great writers have not favoured the theatre is that the theatre has been unworthy of them. That is a very fair instance of the unreality of the publicist. Starting, perhaps, with the moral desire, or the political desire, or the intellectual desire, to abolish the Censorship, they have pressed this argument among others into their service. There

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may be some basis of fact for the argument to rest upon, but one does not fancy it to be a very secure basis. This is the sort of *a priori* argument that may spring fully armed from the head of the born publicist on any day of the week. The publicist, having conceived it, will straightway address all the writers of novels with a question as to why they are not writers of plays also or writers of plays instead ; and all the writers of novels, hating to disappoint their counsel particularly when his leading question is in a flattering sense, will straightway reply that the existence of a dramatic censorship is positively the only reason why they are not all writers of plays. There is no harm done, no harm whatsoever ; but you might just as well address a question to all the writers of plays and ask them why they are not all writers of novels. If you did, they might reply that they wrote for the theatre because it was the vastest reservoir of Art, or with some other Hugoist rhetoric ; or they might reply that they made more money at it, which would probably be true. But if they were quite completely honest they would reply that they wrote what they could and thanked God for their sustenance.

All this is entirely without reference to the question of the Censorship, which the reader

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may sufficiently study in the works of our subject if he happens to be interested. It is not, however, without reference to our subject. Mr. Shaw is a writer who might equally well have taken to the novel or the play. He is one of the few artists of undoubted eminence whom one can picture as determining the form of art to adopt by the toss of a coin—(if that were not in itself, of course, an uneconomic procedure). Perhaps he did toss up, and it came down heads for the novel. Well, he wrote four novels; and then he tossed up again and it came down tails for the play, and he has written plays ever since. And he has not only written plays ever since, but he has been a notable cause of plays in others. Really his is the attitude that Carlyle or Mill or anybody else might have written plays if they had wanted to. I do not think that Mr. Shaw has ever lent himself to the humourless nonsense by which it is made out that the reason why Carlyle and Mill did not write plays was because Mr. William Bodham Donne or somebody would not let them. But what he has lent himself to is the modern movement for evoking plays from anybody and everybody, on the ground that a play is rather a jolly sort of thing to write. That is the genesis, for example, of the Incorporated Stage Society.

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One really is not certain that one has not heard our subject boasting that it was he who set off Lady Gregory a-play-writing at her time of life; or if he has not done that, he has claimed her in some fashion for that paradise for artists which Social Democracy is to be, in which none of us shall consume any happiness without making as much as we consume. All this is very charming in our subject; for there is no quality so rare as the willingness to admit that the particular talent which distinguishes us is equally present in our friends.

Now the one thing, we may be sure, our subject would not do with his talent would be to bury it. If you ask me the precise point at which he determined to re-invest it—to withdraw it from the novel, that is to say, and to put it into plays—I am afraid I am not ready with my answer. One thing, I think, is certain, and that is that Mr. Shaw was not a dramatist by predestination. Nor in any ordinary sense did the hour make the man. There was not a theatre waiting in London for the plays of Mr. Shaw as, later on, there was a theatre waiting in Dublin for the plays of Lady Gregory. The whole history of Mr. Shaw's connection with the theatre in a critical capacity is the history of his efforts to turn the then occupiers out;

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and, having turned them out, he went into occupation himself rather from a sense of duty than because the theatre made any particularly irresistible appeal to him as an eligible residence. It was good enough for his purpose ; he was a clever enough man to capture it, and a clever enough man to make a perfectly good show in it when it was his. More than this, the theatre did happen to provide a natural outlet for the most specific of Mr. Shaw's talents. Our subject was born a talker. In one of his early novels a young lady objects to the modern novel that it is all talk. Certainly the novels of our subject are not quite all talk—they would be even more enjoyable if they were. They are the novels of a very young man who could not find in the home-circle or the debating society an audience wide enough for the many ideas with which he was bursting. In themselves they are the strangest things, these novels, filled with people whose existence and identity it is much easier to forget than to remember, until in dialectical combats they come to sudden unaccountable life. The author himself has confessed to the greatest difficulty, while he was writing them, in remembering what they were meant to be about ; and it is impossible for the reader not to have sympathy with him.

II

The novels of Mr. Shaw's nonage are *The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882), and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883).

When one says that one does not remember what is in the novels of Mr. Shaw's nonage, of course one does not mean that there was not an idea in them. Of course the idea of the first of them was that marriage was all wrong; of the second, that the conventional appreciation of art was all wrong; of the third, that modern prize-fighting was all wrong (although neither we nor the author minded that in the least); and of the fourth, that everything was all wrong (not that, while we were reading *An Unsocial Socialist*, we minded that very much either). For their narrative method was as follows: Mr. Shaw's carefully unconventional hero has just lost his wife (in a scene of carefully calculated unconventionality) and, in the face of the family's assurance that "Death is a serious thing," he agrees to put up a tombstone:—

Trefusis now encountered a difficulty. He wished to pay the mason the just value of his work, no more

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and no less. But this he could not ascertain. The only available standard was the market price, and this he rejected as being fixed by competition among capitalists who could only secure profit by obtaining from their workmen more products than they paid them for, and could only tempt customers by offering a share of the unpaid-for part of the products as a reduction in price. Thus he found that the system of withholding the indispensable materials for production and subsistence from the labourers, except on condition of their supporting an idle class whilst accepting a lower standard of comfort for themselves than for that idle class, rendered the determination of just ratios of exchange, and consequently the practice of honest dealing, impossible. . . .

and so on, and so on. It is no wonder that the personal drama of Mr. Shaw's novels shrinks in the memory. Our economist-novelist's treatment of the final theme was so thorough that it was only by means of appending a letter from the principal character to the author that he could get rid of the impression which was rife among his readers that Socialism was all wrong; readers, too, who were Socialists every one of them, by reason of the periodical in which the novel made its first or serial appearance. Thus the probable truth is, or one possible way of expressing the probable truth would be to say, that these novels had not got any tech-

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nique. Perhaps it was that our young man was too intent on the "ideas" he was propagating—(mainly, it is true, among publishers' readers, a class that is greatly in need of them)—to spare much attention to the form of his anecdotes.

That is why, at an earlier stage of these proceedings, these novels were described as nearly negligible. But not quite. It would be impossible to neglect them for the reason, if there were no other reason, that they are the practising ground, not only of the economist, but of the dramatist. Their mode of expression is facile but various. They are at one moment like the "realistic" novels of Mr. George Moore (with which they were closely contemporary), rather like Wilde the next moment, and exactly like Dickens the moment after that. But at certain moments they are like nothing at all but our subject's own plays. These are always the moments of more animated discussion. Suppose we try the simple experiment of taking one of these novels, of opening it quite at random, and then of transposing the dialogue from the narrative form into the dramatic. This would be the kind of result :—

AGATHA. Do marry me, Mr. Trefusis. Pray do.

TREFUSIS (*determinedly*). Thank you. I will.

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AGATHA. I am very sure you shan't. (*She gathers her skirt as if to run away.*) You do not suppose I was in earnest, do you ?

TREFUSIS. Undoubtedly I do. I am in earnest.

AGATHA. Take care. I may change my mind and be in earnest, too ; and then how will you feel, Mr. Trefusis ?

TREFUSIS. I think, under our altered relations, you had better call me Sidney.

AGATHA. I think we had better drop the joke. It was in rather bad taste, and I should not have made it, perhaps.

TREFUSIS. It would be an execrable joke ; therefore I have no intention of regarding it as one. You shall be held to your offer, Agatha. Are you in love with me ?

AGATHA. Not in the least. Not the very smallest bit in the world. I do not know anybody with whom I am less in love or less likely to be in love.

TREFUSIS. Then you must marry me. If you were in love with me, I should run away.

Now is not that sufficiently like a scene between Valentine and Gloria, between Tanner and Miss Whitefield, between Charteris and Julia, to justify us in our experiment ? Let us pursue it a little further.

Our subject was born a talker, but he came into this world, like his own Cokane, with the pen of ready writer. The dramatic form offers every advantage with regard to dialogue that

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is offered by the form of the novel ; indeed it has the superior advantage in this respect that a play is, if superficially regarded, nothing but talk. That might appear to cut off from the dramatist the pleasant opportunities for descriptive writing—for knocking off in a few well-chosen words a scene or a character. But our subject soon got over that : he made opportunities in his plays for just such descriptive pieces as these early novels show him to have the knack of. Take Mr. Jansenius in *An Unsocial Socialist*. “ Having discovered early in his career that his dignified person and fine voice caused people to stand in some awe of him, and to move him into the chair at public meetings, he has grown so accustomed to deference that any approach to familiarity or irreverence disconcerts him exceedingly.” Or Mrs. Douglas in *The Irrational Knot*. “ Sholto’s mother is a widow lady older than Mr. Lind, with a rather glassy eye and shaky hand, who would look weak and shiftless in an almshouse, but who, with plenty of money, unlimited domestic service, and unhesitating deference from attendants who are all trained artists in their occupation, makes a fair show of being a dignified and interesting old lady.” That is what we read in the novels, with the sole and the single exception that, for the pur-

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poses of our demonstration, the tense has been altered.

It is the same with the pieces of scenic description. This account of a room, for example : "The walls are whitewashed, and at about four feet from the ground a dark band appears, produced by pencil memoranda and little sketches scribbled on the whitewash. One end of the apartment is unfurnished, except by the gymnastic apparatus, a photographer's camera, a ladder in the corner, and a common deal table with oil cans and paint pots upon it. At the other end a comparatively luxurious show is made by a large bookcase, an elaborate combination of bureau and writing-desk, a rack with a rifle, a set of foils, and an umbrella in it, several folio albums on a table, some comfortable chairs and sofas, and a thick carpet under foot. Close by, and seeming much out of place, is a carpenter's bench with the usual implements and a number of boards of various thicknesses."

That is the novelist's account of it, after his tense has been transposed into the historic or dramatic present. And is not that just precisely the account of numberless interiors which our subject, unwilling to surrender any of the enjoyable liberties of the novelist, has put into the mouth of those supernaturally

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observant sparrows on the window-sill who are wont to impart his stage directions to us ?

III

When Mr. Shaw came back to *The Irrational Knot* not long ago in order to write a preface about it, he found, on venturing to look into the book, that it was "a fiction of the first order." Its morality, that was to say, was original and not ready-made. We have not paused, I am afraid, very long over the morality of the novels of Mr. Shaw's nonage ; but we may say at this point, for the better understanding of those who do not know those novels, or whose memory has not succeeded in holding their substance (as Mr. Shaw confesses that his own has not), that *The Irrational Knot* is the story of the marriage of a plebeian expert in electrical dynamics with the niece of an earl. (One thinks that Marian was the niece of the earl, but would not like to be sure.) Conolly's principal business in the book is being rude to everybody—that of an uncivil engineer, as you might say ; he is the *enfant terrible* of Mr. Shaw's literary and dramatic machinery, first cousin of the Welsh composer in the novel about the artists and

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of Trefusis, the Unsocial Socialist, and first cousin once removed from the long family of John Tanner. He marries Marian, who leaves him, and flies to America with another. There—where one does not believe his creator, on evidence either internal or external, to have been—one remembers a particularly resolute handling of the end made by Conolly's sister, who was of the variety profession, and who had, unfortunately, taken to drink. The two women found themselves, in the large city of New York, occupying adjacent floors in the same boarding house—that earliest of Mr. Shaw's "coincidences" one remembers, although what the scene of the death of the engineer's sister can have been doing in the novel is not certain, unless it was to provide the author with his earliest opportunity of being resolute in the face of death. Afterwards, when Marian was rather expecting him to take her back, Conolly turned on his heel and left her with an epigram, an incident that one faintly remembers to have been the best in the book. At any rate, *The Irrational Knot* was a fiction of the first order in the sense that it was "an early attempt on the part of the Life Force to write *A Doll's House* in English by the instrumentality of a very immature writer aged twenty-four." Now

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that was not very economical of the Life Force, since *A Doll's House* had been written already in Norwegian, and there was Mr. William Archer standing by ready to translate it. Torvald and Nora might have joined in the chorus of the lost boys in Sir James Barrie's pantomime, and have told the Life Force that they had been "made before." They had been made before and, the particular point is, they had been made differently. For however Mr. Shaw may dazzle our intelligences with a pure pedigree for the form of his drama by the Time Spirit out of Ibsen, the fact remains that no two dramatists, in every technical respect, are greater strangers to one another. Mr. Shaw, by implication, has offered us the common ground between Ibsen's Torvald and Nora and his own Conolly and Marian as a suitable field for comparison; but, notwithstanding the fact that we have established a certain general kinship between the novels of our subject and his plays, we may prefer a field where a more direct comparison is possible.

Take *Ghosts* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, for example. You may read *Ghosts*, or you may witness it, and never for a moment be aware that anything at all is being "discussed" in Mr. Shaw's sense of the word. The one thing that will strike you, if you happen to think about

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it, is the enormous pains the dramatist has been at to *personalize* his problem. Indeed problem, *quâ* problem, is the last thing that would suggest itself in regard to this drama, so careful has the dramatist been to merge the intellectual in the emotional, the general in the particular. There is nothing, positively nothing at all, in the material of the drama which is not caught up and sufficiently conveyed in Oswald's two utterances, "What sort of life have you given me?" and "I shall never be able to work again." Each of those moments is, in its turn, tremendously moving, and why? — simply because every ounce of the dramatist's strength has gone into the work of preparing those moments.

Now our subject has publicly decried the work of dramatic preparation. It may, he says, "be left to those infortunate playwrights who, being unable to make anything really interesting happen on the stage, have to acquire the art of continually persuading the audience that it is going to happen presently." In his primer of Ibsenism he omitted to make the one point that may be made against Ibsen, indeed that must be made in any examination that is even decently technical: namely, that his anxiety to give pictorial representation to his dramatic mo-

tives (his so-called "symbolism") is carried to such lengths as to retard the imaginative acceptance of his works instead of facilitating it. Thus the excesses of the late Mr. Alving must have their actual and concrete memorial, by a rather cumbersome irony, in a Home for Orphans; the Home for Orphans must be uninsured in order, by an irony equally cumbersome, to hoist the good Pastor with his own petard when it catches fire as a result of his prayer-meeting; and the lurid light of the building in flames must visibly illumine the theme that "everything is burning" as five minutes later the light of dawn must do the same service for Oswald's demand for the sun. It was not necessary to have the drama of Hauptmann and Tchekov before we might make the discovery that all this superior stage "business" is not in the least essential to the real drama of Ghosts. Not only is it not essential, not only would the play be a perfectly good play in the theatre without it, the play would be a better play, since it is the property of imaginative aids, if carried beyond a certain point, to become a hindrance instead of a blessing. It is the consciousness of all this dexterity which is the disturbance; Ibsen's is not quite completely the art which conceals art. It is the same with the death of Hedwig; the

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pathos of that most moving scene is not really assisted by its elaborate compliance with the ritual of the wild duck in the attic. It is the same with the Master Builder, at the end of which play it really seems to have been Ibsen's wish that his audiences should visibly and actually see a human body falling from a church-tower—a piece of stage business at which a whole generation of English stage producers, who have as a rule no particular misgivings with regard to this kind of thing, have quailed. This kind of thing finally got such a hold of him that he wrote a play in which, in order that we might properly appreciate what he was getting at, it was necessary that we should sit by while half the characters were carried away in an avalanche; and the irony of the situation is that Ibsen's "symbolism" really took its rise in nothing at all but his desire to reduce everything within terms of the theatre.

But now for *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. You may admire that play as much as you please, you may praise its author for the good he has done, for the pleasure his intellectual indignation has given you, or for the sometimes humorous and always spirited quality of the dialogue; the fact remains that in it he has done exactly what he defined Ibsenism as

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doing, but what Ibsen did *not* do, and that is he has made Society the principal protagonist in the drama. There is not a word in *Ghosts* of abstract or theoretic discussion: not the smallest suggestion that the fixture of the evening is Mr. Ibsen versus The Social System. Here are five people, it says; from their action and interaction in the twelve hours the dramatist has chosen you may take away what you will in pleasure or profit. Really, if Ibsen had written a preface to that play (because, as our subject would say, he *could*) those dozen words are the whole number of which it need have consisted. There was nothing to say, because everything had been said which the dramatist cared in the least about saying. But in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* everything has not been said. There is no reason why the author should not take a couple of prefaces to lead up to it, and half a dozen treatises to lead down; we know, and he knows, how well he can do them, and there is not the smallest supposition on either side that their interest is any less in kind or degree than the play which happens to come in the middle. Our pulse during that interregnum of reason will move neither faster nor slower than while reason was reigning before or when reason begins to reign after. But because the

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author is aware that we shall *expect* our pulse to move faster, he has included some business with a rifle, a concession to our morbid desire that "something interesting" shall be made to happen. The business with the rifle, it is to be observed, does not serve at all the same purpose as the effects we may find Ibsen preparing; it does not point and underline the revelation of the consanguinity of Frank and Vivie as Ibsen's elaborate leading up to the cork-drawing episode points and underlines the consanguinity of Oswald and Regina. It is just there for its own sake, in the belief that we like it, and if the author himself doesn't much like it, there is the readiest possible consolation for him in the reflection that it is by the originality of its morality that a fiction enters the first order, with no objection offered if the rest is ready-made. In a sentence, our subject has got the consanguinity in; surely he may be allowed to play the usual tricks with a rifle!

Now that is the kind of play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is. It is the kind of play, I think, we should expect from the Puritan turned playwright. Its message is a grave message, but its author "has not been sparing of such lighter qualities as I could endow the book with for the sake of those who ask nothing

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from a play but an agreeable pastime.”¹ It has all its author’s intellectual integrity, but none of the æsthetic integrity of Ibsen. “Nothing would please our sanctimonious British public more than to throw the whole guilt of Mrs. Warren’s profession on Mrs. Warren herself. Now the whole aim of my play,” says the author, “is to throw that guilt on the British public itself.” But Ibsen never did modify thus his plays from within outwards; the peculiar “tightness” of his conception of the dramatic form, with its advantages and its limitations, is the consequence of his craftsmanlike desire to relate the smallest external part to the centre. Thus in *Ghosts* his sole absorbing wish (so far as it is concerned with the throwing of guilt at all, which would be a strange way of putting it) is to throw the guilt on the late Mr. Alving. The Norwegian public may blame themselves for the cheerless environment which their social system awarded the late Mr. Alving if it pleases them. But essentially the procedure of Ibsen is a procedure from the particular to the general. “This is the history of the Alving family,” says Ibsen in effect; “I daresay you may not be wrong if you choose to find this sitting-room a microcosm.”

¹ Foreword to Popular Edition of *Man and Superman* (1911)

IV

But to our author, it is already apparent, the play is *not* the thing; it is in the message, and not in the play, that the social conscience is to be caught. The message is limed, as it were, with all those lighter qualities of which this author has no mean endowment. Indeed those lighter qualities are present in such quantity that before *Mrs. Warren's Profession* they sufficed Mr. Shaw to write two of the most amusing comedies in the English language, and after *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, when the contemporary fashion of trying to write plays in the Ibsen manner had passed over him, they have served him to deck out his philosophy in theatrical form as well as to give him a number of opportunities for minor relaxation.

Thus *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, which was written in 1894, will serve us as some kind of a touchstone. Apart from the circumstance that it has happened to crop up, it will serve us better than *Widowers' Houses*, a play of which the grave message—that, in regard to slum property, “the dirtier a place is the more rent you get, and the decenter it is, the more compensation you get”—is less clearly the *raison d'être*. On one side of *Mrs. Warren's*

Profession we may group the comedies written entirely out of those lighter qualities of which our subject is master: the comedies of which *Arms and the Man* and *You Never Can Tell* are the type perfect. Then come the plays which conform more or less to the *Mrs. Warren*, or pseudo-Ibsen, period: plays in which the lighter qualities set off and render acceptable the grave message. These plays are various, and might be held to range from the *Candida* of 1894-5 to *The Doctor's Dilemma* of 1911. Finally, and indeed all the time, emerges the third group of plays, in which the lighter qualities, freed from the bondage to theatrical craftsmanship, gambol no more for their own delight, however, but in the service of the grave message naked and unashamed. These are the plays of "discussion," beginning, I suppose, with *Man and Superman*, embracing *John Bull's Other Island*, *Major Barbara*, *Getting Married*, *Misalliance*, and ending—Mr. Shaw knows where.

That, then, or something like that, is the progress presented by our subject's drama, to a view that does not claim to be anything more than approximate. If we wished to be subtle, we might regard *Arms and the Man* and *You Never Can Tell* as the Puritan's attempt to capture the theatre for his pur-

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poses by means of a preliminary demonstration that those purposes were no different from the theatre's own. Mr. Shaw has himself told us how he deliberately compounded the second of them out of the well-used ingredients—an if-possible-comic waiter, a little eating and drinking and dancing. The theatre once his, we may see Mr. Shaw behaving to the public precisely as St. Thomas à Becket behaved to the King; the ear he had won by jests he proceeded to preach into. But Mr. Shaw did not drop all at once the pretence that it was the theatre he really was interested in, as the Archbishop dropped his interest in the world; he not only wrote for a little longer pleasant comedies such as *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* which conform to the first of our groups, but he continued up to the very end, as we have seen, to take the lighter qualities into partnership.—Thus Mr. Shaw's early division of his plays into "pleasant" and "unpleasant" is too simple: it is to be likened exactly to his discovery that in the change from the second group of plays to the third he had been actuated by a love of the pure Greek form. We shall be nearer the truth if we look upon the transition as from the Puritan's *oratio obliqua* into the Puritan's *oratio recta*. All the time, according to our

portrait—even at the time of those early little masterpieces in which the utilitarian triumphed astonishingly—Mr. Shaw did want more than anything else to use the theatre to talk in. First he captured it; then he began to talk through the crevices of the ordinary stage framework; finally he threw that framework out of the theatre, and gave the theatre over to open debate between the manifold projections of his own personality.

To complete our sketch, it will be necessary to make provision here for one fourth or subsidiary group of plays—the plays for Puritans self-announced. This will not be in any sense an exact group, but, regarding *Cæsar and Cleopatra* (1898) as the archetype, we may include in it the plays in which Mr. Shaw has handled history. These are full of enlightenment as to the kind of drama our subject's is and is not; but they do not indicate any emergence of his specific talents different from that we should have expected, and have already allowed for.

v

In the first place, then, let us credit the plays of Mr. Shaw with all the debating virtues. We have seen that his aptitude for quick, spirited speech was a natural one; his early novels,

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which are quite without a genuine basis of imaginative existence, have only to run against some topic to be raised to a state of intellectual excitement which precipitates itself in dialogue. We know in what manner this natural aptitude was trained and disciplined by the experience of the platform. It would be hard to say in what degree our pleasure in Mr. Shaw's theatre is contributed by its readiness in retort alone. A thousand instances will come crowding in upon even the least diligent of his playgoers: Major Swindon's "What do you expect me to think of that speech, Mr. Anderson?" and Mr. Anderson's "I never expect a soldier to think, sir"; Felix Drinkwater's "Orn maw grenfawther's tombstown, it is," and Captain Brassbound's "It will be on your own tombstone, presently, if you cannot hold your tongue"; in *Major Barbara* the poor man's "I wouldn't have your conscience, not for all your income," followed inevitably by the rich man's, "I wouldn't have your income, not for all your conscience, Mr. Shirley." This is the typical Shaw "laugh"; it is for moments such as these that we must for ever be indebted to the comedy of our subject. Mere impulsiveness and excess of speech have never ceased to delight him.

Mr. Shaw has admitted that there are

counsels which are valid "for plays in which there is nothing to discuss." But, he adds: "They may be disregarded by the playwright who is a moralist and a debater as well as a dramatist. From him, within the inevitable limits set by the clock and by the physical endurance of the human frame, people will stand anything as soon as they are matured enough and cultivated enough to be susceptible to the appeal of his particular form of art."

That people will stand anything which succeeds in giving them pleasure is perfectly true; it is the firm basis of common sense in all that our subject has said, and the more that he has implied, regarding the negligibility of artistic technique. But the point is, not what the public will stand, but what the artist wishes to give them. Mr. Shaw wishes to give them morals and he employs quite naturally the means of the skilled and delightful debater. If he has been too long, the public have left before the end as remorselessly as the Fabians have left him a quarter of an hour before the inevitability of the Millennium was demonstrated; but they have both enjoyed themselves. That all this dramatic debating is on the surface of things, however, is proved by referring for one moment to any other dramatist you like who is in the enjoyment of a simi-

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larly European reputation. We will not say Ibsen, because Ibsen has come into this chapter already, to render first aid at another critical juncture. Let us take a dramatist, for the better achievement of our parallel, who is something at least of a moralist and who has shown himself to be not the most negligible kind of debater, although he has chosen to be this in other works than his dramatic. Let us take M. Maeterlinck.

It really does not matter in the least what play of M. Maeterlinck's we take, but we will say *Monna Vanna*. Now the whole distinguishing character of the first act of *Monna Vanna*, the whole of our subject's "something really interesting," consists not in what we see, nor in the amusing, or the witty, or the conspicuously poetic quality of the words that are spoken; it consists simply in the progressive creation of illusion. That is what the dramatist *wants* to do; and in order that the public may "stand" what he wants to do, he calls to his aid his own particular mastery over the theatre's own particular powers. The first act of *Monna Vanna* is for three-fourths of its length a dialogue between two persons: that is what the dramatist wants, and since a dialogue of this length between two persons is not an easy thing for the public to

stand, and recruitment of their number by aeroplane or other means is outside his scheme of things, he proves himself a dramatist by rendering this conversation interesting. Now there are two ways of rendering dramatic conversation interesting (if the matter may be put so crudely): one is to be judged by the number of things you stick on to it, the other by the number of things you catch up in it. Wilde was a practitioner in the first kind, Ibsen in the second, Shakespeare in both, but when in the second kind, the more Shakespeare he. The dramatist may catch up the little trivialities of general life with an intensive purpose, as Shakespeare did in the conversation of Shallow and Silence in the second part of King Henry the Fourth; or he may catch up something of profound inner suggestiveness, as when Shakespeare threw into Hamlet's prophecy of long life for the married the sudden conditioning clause, "*all but one.*" What Maeterlinck is doing in this particular act is catching up into his dialogue all the things that are necessary to the imaginative understanding of his fable. He is positing his problem. He is "preparing" (oh horrible words!) his "situation." He is creating, in this particular play, for the events of which it happens that our belief is to be asked, the illusion of reality.

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In another play it might be another illusion, as Congreve and Vanbrugh beget the illusion of amorality before plunging us into the love-chase of Millamant and Mirabell or Loveless and Berinthia. This particular business, this part of your task which consists in employing the theatre's subtlest means to achieve the theatre's plainest ends, does seem, whatever you may call it, to be part of the business of the dramatist.

And now let us see in what manner, and to what extent, Mr. Shaw performs this part of the dramatist's business. Do not let us take the drama of discussion in its most extreme and self-announced manifestations; do not let us take *Getting Married* or *Misalliance*, which are a "debate" and a "conversation" respectively—let us rather take *The Doctor's Dilemma*, which is a "tragedy." What is that highly diverting first act, as a matter of plain truth, all about? It is about the medical profession. And what is it preparing us for? Well, it is preparing us for more about the medical profession—for as much more about the medical profession as, within the inevitable limits set by the clock, we shall be likely to stand. Is it, in any very profound sense, preparing us for the story of Louis Dubedat and Jennifer, as Maeterlinck was preparing us

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for the story of Prinzivalle and Vanna? We really cannot say that it is. And when we come to the story of Dubedat, to the tragic story of the man of genius who was not also a man of honour, can it really be said that we have been persuaded into the most suitable possible mood for the reception of that story? Again one does not think that that can be said. The confession of Mr. Shaw's failure is to be found asserted by himself. And the point is that it is not a failure in what *we* wanted him to do (supposing we were so foolish), but a failure in what he himself wanted to do. We cannot be too clear that to ask Mr. Shaw to impart his morality by means of the implicit method of Maeterlinck, and to condemn him because he has not done so, would be very bad criticism; indeed it would be the negation of criticism, whose only business is to detect what a man has wanted to do and to judge him according to the success with which he has done it. Mr. Shaw has wanted us to believe that his Jennifer was "heartbroken," and we do not believe that she was heartbroken. Mr. Shaw has wanted us to understand that B. B.'s feeling, when he misquoted Shakespeare at the death-bed, "absurdly expressed as it is, is too sincere and humane to be ridiculed." And that

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is something that we do not understand. We have laughed, and that has been good ; but we have laughed, and that is all. And the completeness of Mr. Shaw's self-assertion of failure is rounded and perfect when he tells us that to laugh is the one thing he did not want us to do.

Let us then here make the assertion and have done with it, that in all the sensitive and patient finesses that go to fit dramatic means to dramatic ends, that go, I suppose, to build up great drama, our subject is no kind of a dramatist at all. This, at the end of a first act that is all profession-baiting, that is all idea-mongering, that is Anti-Vivisection and Anti-Vaccination and Jane Marsh's arm, is the positing of the dramatic problem :—

SIR PATRICK. Well, Mr. Saviour of Lives, which is it to be ?
that honest, decent man Blenkinsop, or
that rotten blackguard of an artist, eh ?

RIDGEON. It's not an easy case to judge, is it ?
Blenkinsop's an honest decent man ;
but is he any use ? Dubedat's a rotten
blackguard ; but he's a genuine source
of pretty and pleasant and good things.

SIR PATRICK. What will he be a source of for that poor
innocent wife of his, when she finds him
out ?

RIDGEON. That's true. Her life will be a hell.

SIR PATRICK. And tell me this. Suppose you had this
choice put before you : either to go

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through life and find all the pictures bad but all the men and women good, or to go through life and find all the pictures good and all the men and women rotten. Which would you choose ?

RIDGEON. That's a devilishly difficult question, Paddy. The pictures are so agreeable and the good people so infernally disagreeable and mischievous, that I really can't undertake to say offhand which I should prefer to do without. . . .

It is posited with the highest kind of debating effectiveness, it has all the air of "something interesting," we have stood with delight what went before and (although we shall probably leave before the curtain falls) we shall stand with delight what follows afterwards. But that need not blind us to the fact that it is a pretty jejune kind of thing as drama. The play is not really *about* Dubedat : the play is really about the medical profession. The most tragic thing in the world may be (as Ridgeon says) a man of genius who is not also a man of honour ; but the fact remains that *The Doctor's Dilemma* is not the most tragic thing in the world. It is a peg to hang a treatise upon. And because the treatise will not all get on to the peg, you will find the rest of it in the preface.

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VI

We thus arrive at the preface as the distinguishing feature of Mr. Shaw's drama. It is the general which is never quite forgotten in the particular. It is the dramatic overplus which is not worked in. It is the excess of the philosophy over the anecdote. It is the Puritan fact on which the Utilitarian fiction is founded.

Let us do our best to remember these frequently melodramatic prefaces—"the excited reader," you will find yourself)—these always delightful prefaces, of our subject. Do we not remember the care and enthusiasm with which they give us the facts? Once upon a time Mr. Shaw had to write articles in which to give us the facts, and to depend upon the journals to publish them. He wrote a paper entitled *A Dramatic Realist to His Critics*, which was a delightfully witty paper, and which was entirely devoted to adducing the facts in evidence of his chocolate cream soldier. He quoted the Duke of Wellington and the modern strategists, and he completely proved to his own satisfaction that chocolate creams were just what a really efficient soldier would carry in his ammunition wallet. Not that

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that added to, or subtracted from, our delight in the anti-romantic comedy ; but Mr. Shaw enjoyed the exercise. Now that state of affairs is changed, and if he has any knowledge to air he airs it in a preface.

Mr. Shaw has reason to suspect that certain young women get married without being informed by their criminally timid or neglectful parents of what is expected of young women when they get married. Perhaps someone has told him so. At any rate, he hears somewhere of an isolated case which would seem to lend colour to his suspicion, and in it goes to a Preface on Parents and Children, with the remark that "apparently it does happen." A boy has been birched by a schoolmaster : "I had intended to give the particulars," writes our subject. On how many occasions has he carried the intention into tolerable practice ! It was not for our good that we should enjoy Thomas Broadbent before we had been given the particulars of Denshawai. The preface to *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is so complete and explicit a treatise that it renders any play on the subject quite unnecessary. *The Doctor's Dilemma* is but a pale shadow of the Preface on Doctors. The preface to *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, in which the facts about Cæsar appear, is a much more impressive production than

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Cæsar and Cleopatra, in which Cæsar appears. Do we not remember the extreme and almost unprincipled efforts of these prefaces to get us into a state of convinced receptivity, so that the theatre (which is a church) might preach to converted men? Mr. Shaw would state in one place that the human impulses to murder, burglary, etc., were negligible (we found him doing so on page 34 of this study), being then bent upon shocking us into a proper penitence for our sins of commission. He would then frequently proceed, the business now being to flagellate our sins of omission, to the basing of a case on some instance of just such negligible isolation. "Nobody worth counting believes directly, frankly, and instinctively that when a person commits a murder and is put into prison for twenty years for it, the free and innocent husband or wife of that murderer should remain bound by the marriage." In short (as our subject would say), nobody worth counting commits any murders—our barbarian penal code may be scrapped; but on the other hand so many people commit murders that the hardship imposed on free and innocent persons through the deprivation of conjugal rights is appalling—our monstrous divorce laws are a disgrace. It cannot be necessary to multiply instances

of the truly characteristic manner in which our subject has had it both ways. There have been times at which even those who know no pleasure in life like being convinced must have agreed with Socrates ; that truly, Glaucon, the power of the art of controversy is a very extraordinary one.

But we have not come so far in this study without getting "up" to Mr. Shaw. We are not going to enter an objection to the prefaces of our subject because they are calculated to throw dust in the eyes of the jury. It is no part of *our* purpose to throw any guilt at all. There are people who reprobate Mr. Shaw's prefaces on the ground that their author gave up to politics what was meant for mankind—that he put into prefaces, that is to say, the emotional and intellectual vigour he ought to have kept unimpaired for the plays. But the purpose of this chapter is a purely demonstrative purpose, and we will content ourselves therefore with pointing to the manner in which, as a matter of fact, the institution of the preface erects itself in the middle of our dramatist's record, and divides his works for the theatre into precisely the two classes we have already arrived at (p. 103). If the reader cares at this point to turn to the works of Mr. Shaw on his shelf, he will find that *Arms and*

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the Man and You Never Can Tell, together with *Candida*, had eighteen pages of preface to their three hundred and twenty of play. If now he moves his hand along a yard or so and takes down *Misalliance*, he will find that the pages of preface are one hundred and nineteen and the pages of play ninety-nine. Mr. Shaw, that is to say, had first of all to get his work into the theatre, and with that end in view he shaped it as well as he could. Interpreting the characteristic task of the dramatist, on its technical side, as the invention of "anecdote," he gave the whole of his exceptional intelligence to the invention of really delightful anecdotes. But when Mr. Shaw had got his work into the theatre, he paid very little further attention to anecdote but went on delivering his philosophic goods in the thinnest and lightest of fictional disguises. That is the explanation of why Mr. Shaw has not advanced one single step upon *Arms and the Man* in any direction that has anything at all to do with the technical mastery of the theatre. That is the explanation of the great part which repetition plays in the theatre of our subject. Dryden said of Ben Jonson, "One cannot say that he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it." Mr. Shaw has neither wanted wit nor been frugal of it. But if one

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cannot say that he has wanted invention, one may certainly say—well, that he has been frugal of it.

And it is precisely here that enlightenment comes as to the part Mr. Shaw has played as critic, and particularly as self-critic. All his life he has only had to see a thing in a particular way himself to be certain immediately of twelve good reasons why no man who was not a fool could possibly see it in any other way. It was so with the drama. He found himself with a natural aptitude for debate, an aptitude humorous, pointed and searching; he found “no limit to his power of conjuring up imaginary people in imaginary places, and finding pretexts for theatrical scenes between them.” For the imaginative groundwork of drama it is probable that he had no great natural aptitude. And so what the artist did with greatest ease, the critic came in and asserted to be the artist’s only worthy activity. Mr. Shaw was a natural hand at discussion, and so he defined the drama as discussion. In his first drama of discussion, *Candida*, there is still some attempt at the creation of dramatic illusion. We really believe in its “imaginary people” as we believe most astonishingly in Raina and her chocolate cream soldier. But because we leave off just as ignorant as *Candida*

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and her husband of what the secret in the poet's heart precisely is, because, that is to say, there is some failure in the task of the dramatist, Mr. Shaw calls *Candida* a mystery, and converts at one stroke a defect into a quality. If Mr. Shaw had written this play later on, he would not have left us to guess at the secret in the poet's heart; he would have told us flatly in a preface. *Candida* thus stands at the parting of our subject's dramatic ways. It marks the last of his attempts to make the play the complete and self-sufficient vehicle of the "ideas"—the anecdote of the philosophy. After this he may achieve the pure technical feat once more in *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet*, but it will have the appearance of an accident. The most characteristic and mature theatre of our subject had its beginning after *Candida* was written. In his next play Mr. Shaw came to praise Cæsar; but he wrote a preface which buried him.

VII

It has been contended that the measure of Mr. Shaw's ability as a writer of prefaces is the measure of his inability as a writer of plays. Sometimes Mr. Shaw's prefaces have certainly made it very hard for Mr. Shaw's

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plays to follow them. "Into the blackest depths of this violation of children's souls . . ." we read, and we read on and get *Misalliance*. *Misalliance* is all very well ; but the one is so very much more profound an affair than the other. On other occasions it is instructive to note the statements of the preface when we remember that they are the basis of the illustrative comedy which is to follow. For example, in the preface to *Getting Married* we read : "There is nothing more wounding to our sense of human dignity than the husband hunting that begins in every family when the daughters become marriageable ; but it is inevitable under existing circumstances ; and the parents who refuse to engage in it are bad parents, though they may be superior individuals." And we read again : "Under the influence of the emotion thus manufactured [by the convention that the natural relation between husband and wife or parent and child is one of intense affection] the most detestable people are spoilt with entirely undeserved deference, obedience, and even affection whilst they live, and mourned when they die by those whose lives they wantonly or maliciously made miserable." We may read those grave statements, and be distantly aware that there is a comedy to follow. But

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the question is, What kind of a comedy? What kind of a comedy of husband-hunting, what kind of a comedy of parents and children—(good subjects both, for the Comic Spirit)—*can* follow those statements?

Comedy's function, Mr. Shaw says, is the destruction of old-established morals. It is one definition of comedy's function; it is Mr. Shaw's own gloss upon the function which M. Bergson has brilliantly expounded, having no difficulty so long as he holds fast by the comedies of Molière, but, like a wise man, giving the comedies of Shakespeare a wide berth. Comedy, according to M. Bergson, is "a kind of social ragging"; laughter is a social gesture, having for function the punishment of any "special lack of adaptability to society." Well, it is possible to regard our laughter at Sganarelle, who argues that there is something wonderful in man which does what it wills with his body and who falls down in turning, as a punishment of the poor man for his special lack of adaptability to the stone he stubs his toe against. Don Juan's "Good, so your argument has broken your nose," is a concise social gesture on the part of the Comic Spirit. But transplant M. Bergson's theory of the comic from the other side of the Channel, where it may perhaps explain our laughter at Sgan-

arelle, or at Arnolphe, or at Orgon under the table, and it has but little help to give us in the case of our laughter at Square and Adams, and none at all when we laugh with Falstaff. Greater help it has to give perhaps in the case of Raina and Sergius, of Octavius and Ann, of Broadbent and Haffigan, of Rummy and Snobby, of Mrs. Whitefield and Lady Britomart and Roebuck Ramsden and Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington. And that is why we need not seriously quarrel with another French critic for his discovery in our subject of the English Molière. *Arms and the Man* is as economical and decisive a social gesture as *Le Tartuffe*, and "the monstrous conceit which it is the business of romance to flatter" is pricked and subsides at one and the same moment in which the heroine sinks to the ottoman. "Ce Monsieur Loyal porte un air bien déloyal !" says Molière ; and Mr. Shaw's pleasure, from the time he wrote novels and called his lady pianist Szczymplica, to the time he wrote plays and called his lady acrobat Szczepanowska, has been unfailing in the humorous opportunities of a name.

We may give the French critic his English Molière. But Mr. Shaw, in his work of destroying our old-established morals, has not always been so economical and decisive as we

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found him in *Arms and the Man*. In our subject there is a great deal of the privileged talker, to whom the more we listen the less care he takes in what he says. Really when we get to *Great Catherine* we are inclined to fancy that the only Englishman who still sees the joke of the Englishman abroad is Mr. Shaw himself. There are mechanics if you like in the laughter-making of Molière: you may derive as an induction from *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* that a man should not be too ambitious, from *Le Misanthrope* that he should not be too difficult to please, from *L'Ecole des Femmes* that he should not be too mechanical, from *L'Amour Médecin* or *Le Médecin Malgré Lui* that he should not trust the doctors too completely. You may find in such a typically English humorist as Fielding a chapter entitled, "In which the gentleman descants on bravery and heroic virtue, till an unlucky accident puts an end to the discourse," and fancy you have come upon the proof-perfect of the Bergsonian theory. But there is a difference to be observed in the comedy of our subject.

It could hardly happen but that Mr. Shaw's primary intimacy with the general and his only secondary interest in the particular should leave their mark upon his comic crea-

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tions. They have been called into being by a hypothesis. In an earlier page of this study we found Mr. Shaw proceeding from the statement that "there are millions of poor people, dirty people, abject people" to the shelter in which Major Barbara ministered at West Ham. That is exactly what one means by a procedure from the general to the particular. The postulation of a person by intellectual necessity, as it were, and then the subsequent diligent humanization of that person, is a good way of artistic creation : it is Mr. Shaw's way. His people bear the burden of proof upon them. They carry the heavy responsibility that there are, *a priori*, a million just like them in the world. That is what one means by the "type." Mr. Shaw's people are a perpetual reference back. They bear the endorsement "refer to drawer." They live less for their own sakes than for the sake of the argument. But you would not expect to meet a million Falstaffs in the world. That is to say that there is another way of artistic creation, which is not Mr. Shaw's way.

"But suppose Shakespeare," says our subject, "had begun where he left off ! Suppose he had been born at a time when, as the result of a long propaganda of health and temperance, sack had come to be called alcohol, alcohol had

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come to be called poison, corpulence had come to be regarded as either a disease or a breach of good manners, and a conviction had spread throughout society that the practice of consuming 'a halfpenny worth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack' was the cause of so much misery, crime, and racial degeneration that whole States prohibited the sale of potable spirits altogether, and even moderate drinking was more and more regarded as a regrettable weakness! Suppose (to drive the change well home) the women in the great theatrical centres had completely lost that amused indulgence for the drunken man which still exists in some out-of-the-way places, and felt nothing but disgust and anger at the conduct and habits of Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch! Instead of *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, we should have something like Zola's *L'Assommoir*." There we are, back at the Statesman and at the Puritan again. We may think that, from Shakespeare, we should not have had anything in the least like Zola's *L'Assommoir*. We may think that the change is exaggerated; or rather that it is the difference between Mr. Shaw and Shakespeare, not between Mr. Shaw's world and Shakespeare's world.

It is the difference, I suppose, between laughter for its own sake and laughter with a

purpose ; between that divine, unconscious laughter which plays about Falstaff in the tavern, and that laughter which renders somehow curiously mean and depressing the drunken scene in *Candida*. It is the difference between the laughter which draws the chariot and the laughter which comes in at the cart's tail. Somehow even the happiest of the comic creations of our subject do seem, in the memory, to occupy that penitentiary position. Mr. Shaw spoke the final truth about himself when he said that he had adopted waggery as a medium. His is a grave message : it would issue gravely if it were not for the instinct of absurdity which has never deserted him.

We might have paused earlier in this chapter during our consideration of the most sternly didactic of Mr. Shaw's novels, and refreshed ourselves with the absurdity of the following :

“ Why on earth do you call yourself Smilash ? ”

“ I confess that the name has been a failure. I took great pains, in constructing it, to secure a pleasant impression. It is not a mere invention, but a compound of the words smile and eyelash. A smile suggests good humour ; eyelashes soften the expression and are the only features that never blemish a face. Hence Smilash is a sound that should cheer and propitiate. Yet it exasperates. It is really very odd that it should have that effect. . . . ”

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One does not know why one likes that so much ; but like it one does. It is what Mr. Shaw has called " the great artist's delight in playing with his ideas, his materials, and his readers " : it is part of " the enormous fund of joyousness which is the secret of genius." Mr. Shaw's delight in playing with his ideas has led us into some strange places. But that is not the point. Never has he penned the gravest part of his message without being promptly rather ashamed of himself and turning it to fun. That is very fortunate for us. The demand that we should not laugh at his fun, on the ground that that also is " either a disease or a breach of good manners," need not be taken very seriously, because it is merely more of his fun, and not the grave demand of the grave man that we should attend gravely to his grave message. When B. B. quotes Shakespeare, as a fitting thing to do with Death in the room, it is a shocking thing that he himself in his best professional manner should have committed the murder ; but is an absurd thing that he should mix Shakespeare so delightfully. Mr. Shaw knows that as well as we do ; he knows that the mere mechanical concatenation of the phrases is an automatic producer of laughter, although none of us perhaps, not M. Bergson nor Herr Freud even,

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knows why. But he remembers the gravity of his message, the thought of having a preface to live up to comes over him, and he asks us not to laugh. He would prefer us in the melting mood. "When a comedy is performed, it is nothing to me that the spectators laugh: any fool can make an audience laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood." Well, perhaps our subject's tragedy is in that, for the melting mood is one which has evaded him always.

But the instinct of absurdity has never deserted him. That, in the service of the Puritan's grave message, has given us a drama for which we may be completely thankful. Mr. Shaw's instinct of absurdity is something as completely his own as Shakespeare's or Fielding's great unifying faculty of laughter. Do not let us look at it ungraciously, or pretend that it has not delighted us. There is, however, one possible sense in which we may take Mr. Shaw's demand that we should not laugh as something more than his fun. Deep down in our consciousness, and perhaps in his, lies the knowledge that he has wanted us to do something more than laugh—and we have not done it. We think we know what he means by the melting mood, and we think we know that, please us as he has, divert

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us as he has, instruct us as he has, he has not brought us to it. What he has really aimed at is a change of heart, only that is a consummation which to his particular temperament has presented itself as a change of ideas. He has adopted waggery as his medium, and while we have taken the waggery we have left the ideas. In the work of our subject there is that possibility of a selective rejection, as there is not in the work of the English comic masters. There is a passage in Fielding which will illustrate the unity of the true comic spirit as well as another ; it is the passage in *Joseph Andrews* in which Parson Adams and Mr. Pounce, in the chariot, discuss the virtue of charity :

“ Sir,” said Adams, “ my definition of charity is, a generous disposition to relieve the distressed.”—
“ There is something in that definition,” answered Peter, “ which I like well enough ; it is, as you say, a disposition, and does not so much consist in the act as in the disposition to do it. But, alas ! Mr. Adams, who are meant by the distressed ? Believe me, the distresses of mankind are mostly imaginary, and it would be rather folly than goodness to relieve them.”—“ Sure, sir,” replied Adams, “ hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, and other distresses which attend the poor can never be said to be imaginary evils.”—“ How can any man complain of hunger,” said Peter, “ in a country where such excellent salads

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are to be gathered in almost every field ? or of thirst, when every river and stream produce such delicious potations ? And as for cold and nakedness, they are evils introduced by luxury and custom. A man naturally wants clothes no more than a horse or any other animal ; and there are whole nations who go without them ; but these are things perhaps which you, who do not know the world——” “ You will pardon me, sir,” returned Adams ; “ I have read of the Gymnosophists.”—“ A plague of your Jehosaphats !” cried Peter ; “ the greatest fault in our constitution is the provision made for the poor, except that perhaps made for some others. Sir, I have not an estate which doth not contribute almost as much again to the poor as to the land-tax ; and I do assure you I expect to come myself to the parish in the end.”

Mr. Pounce is our subject's hopelessly private person. Is not his word precisely that of Mr. Shaw's Sartorius : “ No gentlemen : when people are very poor, you *cannot* help them, no matter how much you may sympathize with them.” Parson Adams is—well, one does not think our subject has drawn a Parson Adams. He has not drawn a figure at whom we laugh, and from whom we learn as we laugh. Mr. Shaw's Parson Adams is Father Keegan ; a Parson Adams for Puritans. There is no Keegan-Broadbent, to whom we listen and with whom we laugh. In order that we may

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learn from Father Keegan, Mr. Shaw has to ask us not to laugh at Tom Broadbent. That is the Puritan's tragedy. That is how those "lighter qualities" take their revenge.

VIII

There are, says the old Doctor in Mr. Chesterton's play, the things that are beautiful and the things that are *there*. Well, the plays of our subject are *there*; and it has not seemed necessary in the course of this chapter to pause upon each one in order to recall its anecdote, its philosophy, and its characters. The philosophy, as a matter of fact, will have a chapter to itself in a moment, but the anecdotes and the characters are well able to take care of themselves. If this chapter has advanced certain general propositions with regard to them, if, in the aggregate, it has viewed the drama of our subject from the angle at which the earlier chapters seemed to have placed us, that is all that can possibly be claimed for it; it is left for the reader to apply those general propositions to the memories with which his mind is peopled, and to form his own opinion as to where, if anywhere, they have their application.

The point has come, however, at which it

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would be well to see the ultimate outcome in practice of the principles which, according to our portrait, have actuated Mr. Shaw as dramatist. We have seen already what happened to *The Doctor's Dilemma*, in which play Mr. Shaw faced death and found that life did not cease to be funny. Since we did not believe ourselves to be in the face of death, and since that was what Mr. Shaw wished, as one at least among his several dramatic purposes, that we should believe, it was impossible not to conclude that there was some failure from full mastery in the achievement of those purposes. It was Mr. Shaw, and not life—we were forced to conclude—that had not ceased to be funny. That was the other side, in regard to Mr. Shaw's "tragedy," to the adoption of waggery as a medium. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession* we saw that the "lighter qualities" were not so much present as indispensable traits in the picture as in the form of additional touches,—high lights lent to a gloomy *genre* piece in the purely utilitarian intention of rendering its message more widely acceptable. We found that discovery to be destructive of Mr. Shaw's integrity as an artist, but were careful to say no word against the integrity of his opinions. As to how Mr. Shaw's mixed

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practices work out in regard to the looser and more free form of composition of which *John Bull's Other Island* may be taken as type, we have seen very little; but that is because they obviously would work out in a simpler equation. What we have seen is that, even in the form at which Mr. Shaw has arrived by a process of cancelling out the difficulties, there is a degree of inassimilability in his comedy which places it lower than the highest. Like *Man* and *Superman*, it is a mixed delivery of goods—"a comedy and a philosophy." The way-bill is made out for two articles, and it is for such that we render acceptance.

And in the end we come to *Androcles and the Lion*. Mr. Shaw has his ups and downs, with the least of us; but the fatal fact is that *Androcles and the Lion* is the logical outcome of Mr. Shaw's æsthetic principles. What those principles amount to is that Mr. Shaw wants the drama to be serious, but his way of getting us to accept a serious drama is by means of being funny. Or put the case, if you like, the other way: Mr. Shaw wants the drama to be funny, but his conscience will only allow him to be funny in the course of being serious. Rather than in either one of those statements, it is possible that somewhere between those two

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statements the real trouble lies. But in either case, or in both, the fact is that Mr. Shaw has distrusted his medium. Here, in this play, in what we may perhaps regard as the final issue of his most deeply held opinions, he has employed laughter, but he has not trusted laughter; he has wished to be serious, but he has not had the courage of his seriousness. The wonders of reality are the subject-matter—the wonders of reality, “when it comes close.” Here is our subject’s call to us to look life in the face, to seize each thing in its reality, by the free exercise of our living wills to secure the highest ends of the creative purpose. Lavinia has that happiness within herself,—but Lavinia is less than the lion. Mr. Shaw has looked at the central mysteries of the Christian faith at a crisis in their history, and he has seen the comicalities of the arena. He has employed the one to expound the other. The result is that failure in æsthetic unity which this chapter has been all about. For the intended reality does not “come close.” The ultimate issue of Mr. Shaw’s theatre is a pantomime lion. Mr. Shaw would like to have melted us, and the Life Force has seen to it that he shall only make us laugh.

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IX

For the only dramatic secrets of which Mr. Shaw has the command are the secrets of speech, and there is more power to bring us to the melting mood in Desdemona's "I cannot speak of this" than in all Portia's skilled pleading. Our subject's notion of the manner in which to improve upon her is to make her the equal in discussion of Iago, and the superior of the "simple Moorish soldier." Well, that would be another play and a different. For one kind of eloquence the skilled debater is not the man to go to, and that is the eloquence of silence. "It is not words that matter," another English dramatist has said. That, to our subject, would be the supreme heresy; a kind of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

In a sense, really in the final sense, all Mr. Shaw's people are talkers. We may divide them into three classes. There is a small class which consists of the people who talk with difficulty, of which Cholly is the representative with his "certain amount of tosh," and they are sublimely ridiculous. There is a very much larger class who are the apt and ready mouthpieces of their kind or

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their class. Mr. Shaw runs gaily and lightly up and down the social scale, and his skill with Felix Drinkwater, with Enry Straker, with Peter Shirley, with Bohun and Bonnington and Boxer, with Napoleon and Cæsar and Lady Britomart and General Burgoyne, with Ramsden and Tarleton and MaComas and Cokane and Gilbey and Knox, with William and Marzo and the Newspaper Man, with Darling Dora and Eliza Doolittle and Rummy and Snobby, never deserts him. They are sufficiently personalized, and have in addition a grant in aid from their creator's own readiness of repartee and deadliness of retort. But there is a third class of talkers who have this ultimate importance, that in them we may hear, without distortion and without dilution, their master's voice. These are the talkers by vocation, the apostles of the gospel, the priests of the cult. These are the figures who still hold the stage, when all the other puppets hang limp and depleted, with their virtue gone out of them. These are the real pillars of the theatre of discussion—these gigantic male caryatides, these huge spouting figures, which support the only true church and most characteristic temple of our subject's dramatic achievement. There is a pathos but no shame in Undershaft's "My dear : I have no other way of conveying my

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ideas.” But what place for pathos is there, what place for shame, in the colossal conception of John Tanner?—who will vindicate the dignity and honour of his manhood, who will continue to speak out the happiness that is within himself, who will hold to the last plank of his platform, though the seas rise and the heavens fall; who will “go on talking” in the face of a universe which rocks with laughter.

V

THE SECRET IN THE POET'S HEART

I

"It would be quite easy to make England a paradise, according to our present ideas, in a few years. There is no mystery about it; the way has been pointed out over and over again. The difficulty is not the way but the will. And we have no will because the first thing done with us in childhood was to break our will" (Preface, *Misalliance*).

So there we are:—"unsound citizens of an unsound nation, without sense enough to be ashamed or unhappy about it" (Preface, *The Doctor's Dilemma*). Mr. Shaw's own stream is nearing the sea, he says; and that is the mud-bank he leaves us stranded upon. We could if we would—but we won't. And we won't, because we can't; because of those wicked parents and schoolmasters of ours, who have broken our will. It is a vicious circle.

But perhaps it is not *quite* so vicious. Mr. Shaw is so excessive. Perhaps as the lively stream of

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his works is near its debouchment, he really is not *quite* so unhappy about us. The way has been pointed out over and over again: it is Mr. Shaw who has pointed it. Over and over again, in the course of the few pages of this inadequate study, have we not paused to admire him pointing it? But we have not been unconscious, I suppose, that the direction he has been pointing is the direction *he* has been wanting to go. "According to our present ideas" means according to the ideas of our subject at the moment of writing—just that and nothing more. He wants us to have the will to realize his will, if we may put it that way. And for the rest of us there is the lethal chamber. That is not very good philosophy, but from the political humorist it comes well enough. Mr. Shaw's Paradise may perfectly well not be everybody's paradise, just as Blake's Heaven was the Calvinist's Hell, and just as Broadbent's Heaven was not Keegan's Heaven, for the matter of that. But Keegan's Hell was this present earth, if we remember correctly, and there are others of us who do not think so badly of this present earth. Of one thing we may be very certain, and that is that if Mr. Shaw's Paradise is not our paradise, the will to our paradise will not be the will to Mr. Shaw's

paradise. Our virtues may thus very well be Mr. Shaw's vices ; indeed, the lack of will to Mr. Shaw's paradise, which appeared in the paragraph at the opening of this chapter, must itself be a vice.

Poor old Falstaff will be the first to go. Mr. Shaw is going to put up with men's vices, as he is going to put up with their illnesses, "until they give more trouble than they are worth, at which point we should, with many apologies and expressions of sympathy, and some generosity in complying with their last wishes, place them in the lethal chamber and get rid of them." He has explained all this in that preface to *Major Barbara* which was alluded to in an earlier chapter. If you ask who the "we" is, there is only one answer, and that is Mr. Shaw ; but really Mr. Shaw is under no kind of necessity of answering such questions—that is one of the pleasures of being irresponsible. (And the publicist is irresponsible by definition.) Falstaff would go, because of what (as we saw) the ladies of the new theatrical centres think of his manners and customs. St. Francis would go, because the vice of poverty is a criminal vice. The late Mr. Herbert Spencer would go, because his opinions upon Man and the Socialist State would give more trouble than they were worth. "The majority of men at

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present in Europe," says Mr. Shaw in *The Perfect Wagnerite*, "have no business to be alive." That is a terrible picture, but, as the hymn says,

Alleluia cannot always
Be our song while here below.

Our subject has preached so long from the text that happiness is within ourselves that we must not lose sight of the consequences of its realization. In the place of happiness, in the hedonists' sense, he has put will; and in the place of reason, in the Hegelian sense, he has put will. That is why our parents and school-masters are guilty of such heinousness when they break it. But in both cases the will is, in the ultimate analysis, his own. Of course it could not be otherwise. Every artist, as well as every philosopher, re-makes Heaven and Earth in his own image. That is what our subject has done, in both capacities. He has drawn a full-length picture of the will to our happiness which is within himself, and he has called it the Life Force.

With the subject of this study it is impossible to argue. One just has baldly to assert. I trust that nothing in the nature of argument will creep into this final chapter, or has crept already into those which have preceded it.

II

One thing is evident, and that is that it will not have to be a very long chapter. For our subject's philosophy, now that we have come to it, is not very formidable. It is a philosophy by courtesy, as it were. It consists of what has been in the air ; he does not himself make any very serious claim to have originated it. What he has done is to make its expression quite triumphantly his own—and that he has done by means of the anecdotes. If we have called it a philosophy, it is for convenience, because that is what Mr. Shaw has called it. Remembering that Cokane was moral without being a moralist, let us employ the distinction in defining our subject as philosophical without being a philosopher. And then, in the interests of exact statement, and remembering our Republic, let us make one further refinement, and call him philodoxical rather than philosophical. For what was Plato's distinction between the two kinds of people ? We may as well have the whole passage :—

But what, on the other hand, must we say of those who contemplate things as they are in themselves, and as they exist ever permanent and immutable ? Shall we not speak of them as knowing, not opining ?

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That also is a necessary inference.

Then shall we not assert that such persons admire and love the objects of knowledge—the others, the objects of opinion? . . . Shall we commit any fault if we call these people philodoxical rather than philosophical, that is to say, lovers of opinion rather than lovers of wisdom? And will they be very much offended with us for telling them so?

No, not if they will take my advice: for it is wrong to be offended with the truth.

Those therefore that set their affections on that which in each case really exists, we must call not philodoxical, but philosophical?

Yes, by all means.

Now has our subject set his affections “on that which in each case really exists”? I do not think we can say so. Do we come thus near to the end of a study of Mr. Shaw's works with the conviction growing and swelling within us that Mr. Shaw is one of those “who contemplate things as they are in themselves, and as they exist ever permanent and immutable”? No, by no means. But what Mr. Shaw really has loved is the objects of opinion. It is extremely hard to say what he would have done without them. As an economist he has opined that we should all be extremely happy with a statutory income of £365 a year. As a

critic he has opined that art is great in the degree in which "ideas" enter into its subject-matter. As a sociologist he has opined that the family is the worst enemy of the State. As a psychologist he has opined that "there are many women of admirable characters, strong, capable, independent, who dislike the domestic habits of men; have no natural turn for mothering and coddling them; and find the concession of conjugal rights to any person under any conditions intolerable by their self-respect"—and things of that kind. And as a dramatist he has dispensed with characterization and put in its place the allocation of opinions.

Philodoxical, then, and not philosophical. And that is a very excellent thing to be, when so many philosophers are dull fellows whom no one reads, unless he is another philosopher. Mr. Shaw's philodoxy we have not only read; we have listened to it in the theatre. Out of the mouths of Mrs. Knox and Peter Keegan has come wisdom. Major Barbara has successfully imparted to us her teleological conception. Blanco Posnet has been converted into a convinced kind of dualist, not untouched by mysticism, before our eyes. The manufacturer of explosives has taught us by analogy with his worn-out engines what we ought to do with

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our worn-out religions and moralities. Napoleon himself has been impressed to the service of teaching us that "happiness, little woman, is the most tedious thing in the world"—unless it is that happiness which comes to each man who does "the will of Heaven that is in himself." That is the lesson the Irish priest read to the English candidate for Parliament. That is the power by which Major Barbara surmounted her "hour of trial," that is the power by which Mrs. Knox surmounted hers, that is the power by which the Devil's Disciple surmounted his. Mr. Shaw's drama is rich in hours of trial; they are the Puritan's peripety. "What I did last night," says Dick, "I did in cold blood, caring not half so much for your husband, or for you, as I do for myself. I had no motive and no interest: all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not: I see myself as a fool for my pains; but I could not and I cannot." God had "a cinch on" Richard, in the phrase of Blanco; the Life Force just picked him up by the scruff of his little neck, in the way Valentine and Gloria, and Tanner and Ann, were treated. And what does it all amount to? Well, I suppose it all amounts to

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Major Barbara's "let God's work be done for its own sake: the work He had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women." I suppose it all amounts to what Blanco got on to the table to tell to the boys:

. . . Yah! What about the croup? It was early days when He made the croup, I guess. It was the best He could think of then; but when it turned out wrong on His hands He made you and me to fight the croup for Him. You bet He didn't make us for nothing; and He wouldn't have made us at all if He could have done His work without us. By gum, that must be what we're here for! He'd never have made us to be rotten drunken blackguards like me, and good-for-nothing rips like Feemy. He made me because He had a job for me. He let me run loose till the job was ready; and then I had to come along and do it, hanging or no hanging. And I tell you it didn't feel rotten: it felt bully, just bully. . . .

I suppose it all amounts to the secret in the poet's heart.

"There are larger loves and diviner dreams than the fireside ones," says Major Barbara. Those were what Mr. Shaw's poet was in danger of—the fireside loves and the fireside dreams. He flew into the night, if one remembers correctly. That is why he is the true

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hero of our subject's drama. And Barbara is the true heroine. If Candida, who was contented with the fireside loves and the fireside dreams, is Mr. Shaw's Everywoman, Barbara is his woman in a thousand. Barbara ended her hour of trial by going in for "reality." Mr. Shaw is all for going in for reality. When Margaret Knox went in for reality she knocked two teeth out of a policeman. When Ferrovius went in for reality he killed seven of the Emperor's picked gladiators. And they both felt just as bully as Blanco about it.

III

If Mr. Shaw had happened to want an old name for his principal comedy instead of a new one, he might have called it after Dekker's *If this be not a Good Play, the Devil is in It*. For the third act of *Man and Superman*, in which the Devil appears and hangs the action up considerably, is above all else that our subject has written the primer of the poet's heart. Mr. Shaw's Hell is the place where one merely amuses one's self: Mr. Shaw's Heaven is "the home of the masters of reality." If one wished to appreciate the whole of the difference between the humane destructive talent of M. Anatole France, and the humane

destructive talent of our subject (to be sure, a national difference) one might read the third act of *Man and Superman* immediately after reading the last chapter of *La Révolte des Anges*. M. France depicts Hell and he depicts Heaven, and the suggestion of his picture rather is that he would not give a snap of the fingers for the difference between them. But Mr. Shaw gives Hell, in the strictest scriptural sense, to the hopelessly private persons. His Heaven is reserved for those who live and work instead of playing and pretending. He discriminates by means of his wit, but he discriminates according to his Puritan prepossessions.

The truth is there never was a more romantic admirer of reality than our subject. His religion is a romantic anthropomorphism: what more romantic theological concept could there possibly be than that of "a young God with his future before him"? His philosophy is a romantic protest against the evolutionary monism of Darwin and Haeckel. He is all for Lamarck's giraffe, provided it is agreed that it grew its neck out of the happiness within itself, and because the Life Force had a job for its long neck to do. His economics are a romantic protest against the materialism of Marx, and a perpetual exhibition of the glorious excitement

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of a life among "hard facts." His æsthetics are a romantic onslaught upon the morals of yesterday, in the romantic name of to-morrow. His novels are romances: in three of them there is a man with his back against the wall—(what figure is there more romantic than the one against forty-eight millions?)—and the fourth has a professional pugilist for hero. His drama is one long exhibition of the part played by romance in the world of ideas. Love, in his drama, is the electrical experience of a Valentine in face of his Gloria. Marriage, in his drama, is not for the homely purposes ordained by the Prayer Book, but for the procreation of the Superman. "And sweet religion makes a rhapsody of words"—it is a tremendous affair, which Blanco discovers with the aid of a rainbow and Major Barbara with the aid of explosives.

Finally, has not our subject's whole conduct of this earthly adventure been romantic? Romance is the artificial inducement of glamour. In this sense of the word, it was the enemy. Our subject proposed to destroy romance. It was the great heresy to be swept away from art and life. No more glamour, he said, no more glamour—and proceeded to induce an aura of glamour around his own person. "It would be far better for everyone,

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as well as far honestest, if young people were taught that what they call love is an appetite which, like all other appetites, is destroyed for the moment by its gratification ; that no profession, promise, or proposal made under its influence should bind anybody. . . ." There was to be no more glamour about love and marriage ; but there might be glamour about Mr. Shaw. It is extraordinary how our subject has beglamoured the age he has lived in ! He has lived in a world " seething with the reaction of Ibsen's ideas "—that has been a very remarkable experience for him. And all his friends and acquaintances have been the most remarkable fellows. They have all attained to the dignity of mention in his prefaces or incorporation in his plays ; and this has redounded not only to their honour but to his own. No picture of our subject would be complete which did not take account of this veiled or spreading egotism. When posterity sits down to read straight through the works of our subject, the profession of letters in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth will appear a tremendously big adventure. And yet the truth is that our old world has not seethed. The profession of letters has been the usual comfortable or uncomfortable jog-trot. The

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things which exist ever permanent and immutable have existed permanent and immutable still. The truth is that our subject, for the purposes of effective assertion, has invented one ultimate anecdote; and that anecdote is the anecdote of G. B. S.

“Whenever a person tells us that he has fallen in with a man who is acquainted with all the crafts, and who sums up in his own person all the knowledge possessed by other people singly, to a degree of accuracy which no one can surpass,—we must reply to our informant,” says Plato in his Republic, “that he is a silly fellow, and has apparently fallen in with a juggler and mimic.” Well, Mr. Shaw fell in with a juggler and mimic, but he was not taken in. “The legend of the superlative brilliance of G. B. S.,” he has said, “is all my eye.” What our subject has given he has not failed, with that even administration of laughter which is the best of his powers, to take away. He would agree with the late Samuel Butler, that the advantage of doing one’s praising for one’s self is that one can lay it on so thick and in exactly the right places. Having created the Superman—or had we better say, in reverence for those terrible fellows the Nietzscheans, having taken out for the Superman papers of naturalization in

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England—our subject has laughed at the Superman as “a kind of good-looking, philosopher-athlete,” if one remembers correctly. Having baptized the Life Force, he has laughed at the Life Force, for sounding (as, to be sure, it does sound) like the Life Guards. And in the same way, having created Mr. George Bernard Shaw by a sedulous care and devotion that are without a parallel in our contemporary literary history, he has laughed at Mr. George Bernard Shaw. There is no surer sign of the indwelling presence of the comic spirit than this ability of a man to laugh at himself, as well as at the forty-eight millions. But that is not the point for the moment. The point for the moment is that while our subject believes confidently that Mr. George Bernard Shaw will not be found out by the present, he believes with an equal confidence that Mr. George Bernard Shaw will be found out by the future. “The fact,” he says, “that in all the professions there is one first favourite means no more than the fact that there is only one editor of *The Times*. It is not the man who is singular, but the position. The public imagination demands a best man everywhere ; and if Nature does not supply him the public invents him. The art of humbug is the art of getting invented in this way. Every generation invents great

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men at whom posterity laughs when some accident makes it aware of them." That passage from an obscure economic pamphlet—(if we dare call obscure any economic pamphlet which our subject has written)—will serve as an instance of Mr. Shaw's regard for the future. It is a thoroughly romantic regard.

IV

To some slight extent the task of this book has been the uninvention of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, whom our subject has so diligently and artistically invented. Its task has been to get in ahead of posterity, and that is why it was necessary at the beginning to declare as modestly as might be for the rights of contemporary judgment. And now the only task which remains is the estimation of influence.

Mr. Shaw has edified and delighted his age, but he has not profoundly affected it. His usefulness has been the usefulness of the man who, in face of our complacent assurance that our garments are white, has gone on reiterating his assertion that they are black, until we have looked at them and found that in places they have turned a bit greyish. His temperament does not know any half-measures. He is like

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Falstaff in this, that he "had as lief they would put ratsbane in his mouth as offer to stop it with security." His unflagging good spirits, with their consequent excessiveness of utterance, while they have been the truest friend of his comic style, have been the worst enemy of his opinions. "A person who talks with equal vivacity on every subject," says Hazlitt, "excites no interest in any. Repose is as necessary in conversation as in a picture." It is the beauties of repose that have evaded Mr. Shaw's conversation. His first instinct, when he has got hold of an idea, has been to run out and tell us about it. All his life he has told us everything that came into his head—every single thing that came into his quite exceptional head. He has been like a busy salesman with a demand on his shop, so heavily engaged in handing out his goods that he has not been able to spare much attention to the manner of their wrapping. He has had so many ideas, and he has run out into the street so often, that his appearances, like those of the boy who called wolf, have affected his hearers less deeply than they ought to have done. In his presence, we have been in the position of the Duchess's baby in Alice, at whom the cook threw the saucepans: "the baby was howling so much already, that it

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was quite impossible to say whether the blows hurt it or not." He has given us a very great deal, but he somehow has not always given us just what we felt disposed to assimilate at the moment. In all the works of our subject there is a hint of the indiscreet helper, who does better than the scriptural injunction by giving us a cupful when we ask for half a cup. And Mr. Shaw has even given us some in the saucer.

Nevertheless the person who can look into those works without being aware that Mr. Shaw wields the best everyday style of his generation is a person without judgment. In the best sense Mr. Shaw's has been the pen of the ready writer, a pen apt, humorous, and colloquial—even on occasion eloquent. He has thrown the sheets over his left shoulder with the rapidity of Count Fosco, but the most genuine labour has gone to their composition. Our subject is a great man, it cannot be too flatly or simply asserted, just in the degree, and just by reason of the fact, that he is a good writer. In the same manner in which we would rather have him philodoxical than that he had taken the degree of Ph.D. in all the colleges of Germany and America, so would we rather have his own first thoughts than the second thoughts of men who are duller. Everything he has

written has radiated a very splendid kind of intelligence, even if it has not always revealed the profoundest sort of understanding. The person who can look into *Arms and the Man* or *Man and Superman*, or even into *Fanny's First Play*, and not be aware of this, is a person whose opinion is not worth taking upon the qualities of diction in comic drama. Concerning Mr. Shaw's drama in the bulk, you may assert that it is no more than good dialogue cut up into lengths, and that drama, in the full sense, is something more than good dialogue cut up into lengths. You may (quoting Mr. Shaw's *Devil*) sum up his plays as "interesting chats about things in general." You will have every appearance of justice in making the assertion. But it is not open to you to assert, if you wish your powers of comparative analysis as well as of instantaneous enjoyment to be respected, that Mr. Shaw's dialogue is not good comic dialogue. Similarly you may be as certain as you are of your faith or your pleasures that drama is made great by the grandeur or intensity of its emotion, and by no other quality at all. Again you will more than probably be right. But that will not justify you in denying all value to Mr. Shaw's drama because it is entirely without emotional value. When, however,

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you find Mr. Shaw asserting, in *his* capacity as judge, that drama is made great by the quantity and originality of its ideas,—then, ah then, you may fall upon him and slay him. You will slay the critic, but you will not slay the artist. The artist is what he has made, and Mr. Shaw has made a number of creatures, call them what you will, of which any honest man would be proud, in whatsoever æsthetic belief he had constructed them.

The case of our subject is thus all kinds of a case. One looks in retrospect along that lengthy line of his works—each in its jacket of a jaegerized Lincoln-green seeming equally to stand for good taste and good hygiene—and one despairs of having done them any kind of justice; one despairs of having given any kind of account of them at all. At least we have not done them the popular injustice contained in the assertion that they have “made us think.” It is the tragic nemesis of Mr. Shaw as artist that he, the opponent of “reason,” the ceaseless advocate of that happiness which is the living will’s, should be held in high estimation by the young on every hand because he has “made them think.” He is a strange fellow, he must be allowed his joke, he must be suffered to stand everything on its head, for, my

goodness, how in the process he makes us think ! That is an unhappy ending for one of the strong souls who has had the will and courage to look facts in the face—and who would only have had us equally strong in order that we might look with him. It is Mr. Shaw's particular romanticism which is to blame for the misunderstanding ; the romanticism of the anti-romantic. He has so loved the " facts " ; he has so rushed at them ; he has so omitted to infect us with his own happiness regarding them. Take the one question of marriage. " There is no magic in marriage," Mr. Shaw says. But all this means is that Mr. Shaw sees no magic in marriage. He has not stopped long enough to see it. Turgenev defined the heart of another as a dark forest. That is the kind of attitude of mind that one would somehow expect in the artist. But Mr. Shaw sees right straight clean through the forest. The whole of his attitude consists in the ability to see right straight clean through it. Of the romance of finding in the human heart the wonder of a dark forest Mr. Shaw knows nothing ; his is the romance of denying the dark forest. He takes one look at the forest and he sees all the trees. Thus when the topic of marriage presents itself to his imagination, he becomes aware of a number of what one

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might call its minor considerations. He sees, for example, with unerring swiftness and decisiveness of vision, the practical difficulty of agreement between the partners to the contract as to how many clothes are to be on the bed. . . . About this point he promptly writes two comedies and a preface, and what they all amount to is, "You are wrong : there is no magic in marriage."

Thus our subject's is all kinds of a case. He took up the English novel, and did nothing at all to assist it to the position which even then it was just slowly beginning to regain. He took up the English drama, and while he could not fail (in the circumstances) to write the most intelligent plays that had been written in England for a century, he will leave no path for the English drama to advance upon. The drama of discussion—(in technical form a genus of opera without music)—is too purely personal a product to have any future before it, or for us to wish that it may have any future apart from Mr. Shaw's future. As a critic of the arts, he has written about plays, and he has written about music, and he has written about pictures, in a manner supremely intelligent and delightful. But it is probable that, in his criticism of the theatre at least, there is too much of the impatience of the man who

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wants to get on to the job himself for these writings to rank amongst the best of their kind. Of the patient watchfulness which will wait, even as the artist's, upon perfection, of the instantaneous emotional responsiveness with which perfection in any kind is greeted, there is almost nothing in the criticism of Mr. Shaw. It was always an intellectual responsiveness he had to offer. Mr. Shaw found that he could only laugh at *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and the reason why that was not enough was because other people were doing it. "Give me your ablest critic," says Mr. Shaw, "and I will criticize his head off." He has criticized as many heads off as Alice's Duchess, but he has not always criticized the heart out of a work. Mr. Shaw is extremely fond of music, but about the last idea the stranger would gain, I suppose, from his treatise of Wagnerism, would be the idea that Wagner was a man who made music.

In all Mr. Shaw's work in the arts, critical and creative, a part is thus played by the irrelevant motive. Never very far from the centre of his mind are "all the detestable fruits of inequality of condition." In this life there are secular hardships and anomalies enough for correction, God knows; but the

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artist, *quâ* artist, does not find, I suppose, the fruits of inequality of condition detestable. For him they rather add to the fun of the human spectacle. But Mr. Shaw is out to alter all that. What Mr. Shaw wants, more than anything else, is to change our ideas; and art is a weapon in the *chambarde-ment général*. He condescends to the fun of the human spectacle, not for its own sake, but to point a moral. Just as the persons of his drama are logical abstractions to whom, to aid in their acceptance, a surface humanity is added, so is his drama itself a secondary image of his picture of the world. He sees men as ideas walking. He sees art as a conflict of ideas. A thousand lovable, intimate, humorous, ridiculous, recognizable traits he sees, and he makes a pastiche of them for his purposes. They do not result in the comic vision. (Impossible, when the whole stretch of his work is remembered, to say that they result in that!) They do not result in the tragic vision. "The very same thing, don't you see," says Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina*, "may be looked at tragically, and turned into misery, or it may be looked at simply and even humorously." Impossible to assert that Mr. Shaw has turned things into misery. All the time one remembers Trefusis, that

hero of his early novel, whose "sympathies were kept awake and his indignation maintained at an exhilarating pitch by the sufferings of the poor." Mr. Shaw's vision is so composed of mind and heart that it has maintained his indignation "at an exhilarating pitch." It is the publicist's vision.

v

Thus it comes about that the final estimation of our subject must be ideological. "Nothing is more certain," said Mill, "than that improvement in human affairs is wholly the work of the discontented characters." Our subject is a thoroughly discontented character. He has a special faculty for putting the world in the wrong. He cannot think of the human species with patience. He is the antithesis of that character whom one remembers in one of Mr. Henry James's novels (and indeed, who might have occurred in any one of them) who "looked about him like a man to whom everything suggested a cheerful interpretation." He has delighted us with man, he has delighted us with woman, but finally and profoundly man has not delighted him, nor woman neither.

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That is why he has called for the Superman. He has expressed from all the platforms in the park an explicit detestation of the fruits of inequality of condition ; he has written a matter of thirty plays with the expressed purpose of destroying our old - established morals ; and now, as his stream nears the sea, he finds himself " driven to offer to young people in our suburbs the desperate advice : do something that will get you into trouble " (Preface, *Fanny's First Play*). I suppose, since an improvement in human affairs is a business that takes time to show itself, that the contemporary measure of the success of an uncontented character is the number of the uncontented characters he has made. As regards the actual influence of our subject on his generation, there has been a good deal of " bearing " on the part of those who share Mr. Shaw's belief that the public demands a best man everywhere, and who rather fancy (although they do not perhaps make the admission even in private) that they themselves are the man. There has been a good deal of " bulling " on the part of those who are actually as youthful in years as Mr. Shaw has remained in spirit. His reputation will find its own level about midway between those two points, as reputations do, after the market has been

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higgled. All Mr. Shaw's higgling of his own market will not matter at all. That is merely a trait in the portrait; that is merely the particular cry with which he has brought his goods to market. Let us hope that our subject has made a very great number of uncontented characters. Let us hope that the suburbs are filled with young people of both sexes who have taken his desperate advice; who nurse, each one of them, the secret in the poet's heart. Let us hope that they are Eugenés and Major Barbaras, every one of them.

And with that hope expressed, one surrenders again the pen explanatory into the hand in which it is so much more amusing—into the hand one wishes may go on wielding it for ever. We have been, during these few pages, no more than that "Voice" at the political meeting which interpolates its remark between the remarks of the principal speaker; that "Voice" whose function it is to contribute to the successfulness of the meeting, and whose immortality it is to see itself in print the next morning. Perhaps, in however small a degree, we have contributed to the successfulness of Mr. Shaw's meeting. And if we have not, then this will be a suitable point at which to retire from it; for, frankly and finally, the business

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of estimating the effective influence of a man on his generation is a business one despairs of achieving. Mr. Shaw has on so many occasions piped unto us, and we have not danced ; he has mourned unto us, and we have not lamented. He has expressed his distaste for the scorched corpses of animals, and we continue to eat meat with our bread. He has commented with all his force upon the deterioration in the figure and character of Falstaff, and we continue to drink beer with our meat. He has held up his hands in horror at the British double bed, and we continue to sleep in it. He has proved that there is not a single credible established religion in the world, and we continue to believe in it. He has mined with his absurdity and blown up with his wrath the institution of the family, and the institution of the family continues to exist and is daily refortified. He has pointed the finger of ridicule at our very own indispensable mothers, and we have laughed at the ridiculousness which Mr. Shaw has seen and we have seen something else besides. All his life he has been like King Cole ; he has called for this, and he has called for that, and some of the things for which he has called we have brought him, and some we have not brought him. On behalf of the generation he has

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adorned and illuminated, "We now call for the Superman," he says. Do not let the last words of this book assert that there will be no answer.

August, 1914.

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